

The Collected Plays of John Drinkwater



The Collected Plays
of John Drinkwater
Volume I

Sidgwick and Jackson
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Preface

THE chronological order of the following plays is indicated in the Contents. The early plays in verse were written during my first experimental days at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, where for some years I was actor, producer, manager, and odd-job man. If the present volumes were dedicated to one man I should not have to think for a moment beyond my friend Mr Barry Jackson, in honour of one of my most greatly treasured friendships, and in memory of the days when for so long we tried to learn something of the craft of the theatre together.

Hostile criticism will always find its occasions in whatever may be said by the object of its distaste, and I wish for nothing better than that it should be as little concerned with myself as I am with it. But a writer, when he is gathering together the work of a good many years may be allowed to say a few words by way of explanation to his friends. When I so collected the poems that I had written up to the year 1923, I said nothing about them, because one cannot argue about one's own poetry. For better or for worse it is there, and there it will remain, of a permanent quality for changing tastes

to like or dislike. But the drama is a more empirical affair, more subject to outside influences, and created more directly in relation to external necessities. It is a crude differentiation, untenable perhaps in æsthetic theory, but it will serve for the moment to say that poetry is written by the poet to please himself and drama to please himself and audiences. Ultimately the merit of his drama has to be judged by the degree of success with which he has been able while pleasing audiences really also to satisfy his own conscience.

While, therefore, I should not be so ingenuous as to attempt to point out merits in these plays that might not otherwise be perceived, I may be allowed to say something of the circumstances in which they were written, and, since they have properly faced the rough-and-tumble of dramatic criticism, I may also be allowed to suggest not what they are, but certain things that they were never intended to be.

My affections have never been divided between poetry and the drama. For some time in the early years at Birmingham it was an ambition to help as far as one could towards the restoration of the two upon the stage in union. I remember that John Galsworthy warned me that the shadow of the man Shakespeare was across the path of all who should

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attempt verse drama in these days. The experience of *Rebellion* showed me that in that direction at least he was right. If anybody chooses to read into this confession any note of self-esteem, he is welcome to his delusion. *Rebellion* here appears as it was played, except that I have stripped it of a little of its rhetoric. The one-act plays in verse, which have not been revised at all, were attempts to find some other constructional idiom whereby verse might be accepted as a natural thing by a modern audience. That two of them at least have been in more or less continual performance ever since they were written suggests that there was something in the method. The Masques which appear in the Appendix were written expressly for performance by a large number—between two and three hundred—of Messrs Cadburys' workpeople at Bournville. The greatest simplicity of mass effect in the open air was aimed at, and a technique that would be within the acting resources of a large and enthusiastic but unskilled company of amateurs.

The transition from verse to prose, from $X=0$, that is, to *Abraham Lincoln*, was not a surrender, but a recognition that any chance of development in one's dramatic technique depends upon an acceptance of the fact that if one insists on staying in the

theatre at all one may be anything one likes so long as one is not doctrinaire. The problem to be solved was how to keep in the sparest prose idiom something of the enthusiasm and poignancy of verse. In the days when verse was the natural speech of the theatre, its beauty, like the beauty of all fine style, reached the audience without any insistence upon itself. The guiding principle of the speech of these plays later than *X=0* has been, so far as I could manage it, to make it beautiful without letting anybody know about it.

When I wrote *Abraham Lincoln*, I had in my mind a group of historical plays conceived on a more or less definite plan. It was not that chancing upon Lincoln and Cromwell and the rest I thought they would be interesting characters to write about. It was that having deliberated a good deal on certain themes that I wanted to dramatise I found in these figures a release, as it were, for my imagination. One concrete example in three phases will suffice to illustrate my meaning. The problem of leadership, of the one man, human in all respects like the rest, being set in a position of great authority above his fellows, seemed to me to be of immense dramatic significance. And the problem presented itself in several aspects. There was the man who, certain of his aims, had to face all the

cunning and malice of unscrupulous intrigue in order to preserve what he conceived to be the only sure foundations of society as he knew it. This was leadership determined to preserve a great establishment. There was then the man who was convinced that society as he knew it was being destroyed by corruption and tyranny, and who was determined with a religious zeal to sweep away the old order and found a new one. Then again, there was the leader who felt, with absolute purity of heart, that loyalty to his own tradition was the first, and altogether becoming, duty of man. Here, then, were the three aspects of my problem, or perhaps one should say three of the aspects: the leader inspired by a great moral idea to the vindication of a system, the leader inspired by a great moral idea to the overthrow of a system, and the leader for whom a system became a great moral idea in itself. And Lincoln, Cromwell, and Lee emerged from the diversity of my reading as figures precisely apposite to the dramatisation of these aspects, or they may be said to have crystallised the aspects in my own mind. From this position certain deductions may easily be made. My intention in these cases was not the exhaustive presentation of a character but the dramatisation of a theme. I was, therefore, entitled to take or reject such elements of

character as I chose. It is not the business of criticism to tell me that Lincoln, Cromwell, and Lee were this, that, and the other thing that I have not shown : that Lincoln was as fond as most people are of smoke-room stories, that Cromwell wore dirty linen and behaved like a maniac in Ireland, or that after Appomattox Lee became an admirable school-master. The fact that I have not shown these men as some things that they were is of no consequence ; criticism's part is to point out anything essential that I have shown them to be which they were not. If I have succeeded in dramatising the idea without falsifying character, I have fulfilled my intention. I should be the last person to claim that I have so fulfilled it, but at least we may as well be clear as to what the intention was. If the dramatist, in using historical figures for his purpose makes them behave as they might have done within his chosen action, it is a waste of breath to tell him that they would have behaved differently outside it. A Scotch journal devoted to education recently suggested that somebody ought to send me some books about Mary Stuart. At the same time I must allow that my own experience of education in Scotland is that it is usually very intelligent.

As with character, so with event. The dramatist may legitimately take as little or as much as he likes

of character (I have, for example, in a new play on Robert Burns tried to show a wide complexity of character as I have tried to do in none of my other plays), and he may choose as much or as little as he likes of historical action; he may even manipulate historical action so long as he does not essentially traverse it. These things should not need saying, but it is clear, from the hysteria to which pedantry allows itself to be excited in the theatre, that they do. The first, last, and only test of a play is whether it is dramatically interesting, first on the stage and in a secondary degree on the printed page. We have no right to apply to it tests of our own special knowledge any more than we have the right to apply the tests of realism to symbolic methods. The fact that some Southern Americans objected that Joseph Dodd, when he played the negro in *Abraham Lincoln*, was more like a Chinese coolie than like a Virginian coloured man, always seemed to me to be supremely unimportant. That charming comedian, whose death was so untimely, conveyed in his performance the precise quality and emotional significance that was intended by the play, and a Southern American who was really alive in the audience ought to have responded as readily to this as I should to a beautiful performance of Nelson by an actor from Minneapolis. If it be asked why, all

this licence being claimed, historical characters and stories should be used at all, the answer is that they help the dramatist in two quite legitimate ways. They save him a waste of energy in plot invention, and they start him off on terms of some understanding with his audience. In making the latter use of history, the dramatist is doing exactly the same thing as he does when he uses contemporary scenes and fashions. The modern play about Salford or Wiltshire or Mayfair, if it is worth anything at all, is not concerned chiefly with the superficial peculiarities of these respective environments, but in each case uses the environment and its peculiarities as a familiar means whereby the dramatist can approach his audience and say what he has it in him to say about life. Objections founded upon special knowledge are always futile in the theatre, and if Mr Shaw in producing *The Doctor's Dilemma* chooses to consult Harley Street as to stethoscopes and jargon and etiquette, he only does so in order to save himself the trouble of having to bandy words with simpletons afterwards. And so in general dramatists and producers do in practice take all reasonable steps to satisfy the demands of verisimilitude, but no one with any respect for his art in the theatre is going to allow these demands to become a tyranny. When a play is written

about prison laws or Disraeli or damaged goods, a number of people will find their way into the theatre, not because they care twopence about the drama, but because they have some *a priori* interest in legislation or politics or disease. There is no particular harm in this, but most of them are certain to go away and apply a lot of special arguments to the theatre that the theatre in its rational moods has never had the slightest interest in meeting. A great number of godly, righteous, and sober people, even of people wittily interested in the other arts, care nothing about the theatre, and we need not quarrel with their indifference. But if we do go to the theatre, we must accept it on its own terms. It is a manifest absurdity, in the face of the achievement of English drama, to say that to do this we have to leave our intelligence behind us. The intelligence of a theatre audience may be as keen as it likes, but it has to be not only prepared but eager to function in response not to text-books nor ordnance surveys, but to drama. It is notorious that a great many people who write about the theatre have no such eagerness.

I hope that in this prefatory note I have not been too argumentative. I had no intention of making anything but the smallest roar. And even so I would not have it be in complaint. My own

adventures in the theatre, in which I persist in spite of many warnings, have been treated with the most generous indulgence. Also they have provoked some people to a most diverting frenzy, and that all helps to keep the spirit of the thing going. The theatre always has been, and always must be, the knock-about arena of the arts, and no one should go into it who is not prepared to give and take cudgellings. But there is no reason why courtesy and good temper should not be the rule of the ring, so long as mere ignorance is disqualified as it should be.

J. D.

April 1925

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∴ The music for the songs in "Mary Stuart" was composed by George Drinkwater. The music for the Masques was composed: by Rutland Boughton for "An English Medley," by S. W. Sylvester for "The Pied Piper," and by James Brier for "The Only Legend" and "Robin Hood and the Pedlar."

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Cophetua

TO
JOHN GALSWORTHY

THE CHARACTERS ARE—

KING COPHETUA

A CAPTAIN

FIVE WISE MEN

THE KING'S MOTHER

THE MAID

BEGGARS

Cophetua

The Scene is the Hall of the King's Palace. On the left are two thrones, one above the other, with chairs below them.

At the back of the stage is a tall doorway, open, showing a path to a broad flight of steps which leads up to the Temple. Two or three Beggars are sitting on the steps.

There is an open corridor to the right of the stage.

The King's Mother is seated on the lower throne. On the chairs below are Five Wise Men and a Captain.

Captain. 'Tis noon, and with echoing wing
The days of a month have sped,
And we stay to know if the King
Will take a queen to his bed.

The King's Mother. You have the oath of a King
That, be it for weal or woe,
In the space of a month he would speak of this
thing,
He will come, he will come—you shall know.

First Wise Man (very old). He will hear. Not in
vain, not in vain
Shall his people beseech him of this,
He will hear us, nor count of the pain

Which may bloom peradventure to bliss.
I have stood at the gates of the kings,
His fathers, by year and by year,
They failed not to grant us the things
That were shaped in our prayers. He will hear.

Second Wise Man. He is haughty and fiery proud,
A spirit not easy to tame,
He will face us unbroken, unbowed,
And scorn us and put us to shame.

Third Wise Man. He is King, and howbeit he
turns
To the right or the left it is well,
If he hearkens our crying or spurns,
He is King. It is well, it is well.

Fourth Wise Man (blind). Since the day when
God shattered my sight
I fear whatso things may befall,
Who shall know if he answer aright ?
Who shall say if of wisdom our call ?

Fifth Wise Man. I wait for his word unafraid.
The ways of the world are set out
By God's will ; shall we tremble dismayed
However this thing come about ?

Captain. By the might of the spear, he shall speak
As we bid him to speak, or his crown
Shall be broken—what, are we so meek
That we bow if a King should but frown ?

King's Mother. I fear him. My son, should you be Cophetu.
Too stubborn, how then should I set
Any peace in my heart or go free
Of a fear that I might not forget ?
How then, with a sword set between
Your crown and the men of the land,
Should the pride in my heart keep clean
For a son who held hate by the hand ?

*Enter, from the corridor, King Cophetua. They all
rise as he goes up to his throne. As he takes
his place he motions them to sit.*

Cophetua. I have come. As a slave ye have
called me.

As a dog to his masters I come.
With the sting of your tongues ye have galled me—
Do you bid me to speak or be dumb ?
O my masters, your King is before you,
A plaything, a chattel, a fool,—
Cry shame on the mothers who bore you
If you bend not his will to your rule.
Shall a King in his folly be daring
To speak as he would, to be wise
As he knows in his heart, and set flaring
His insolent flame to the skies ?
Shall a King give a thought to his vision
When his masters forbid him, and frown ?

Throw your dust in his teeth, and derision
Pluck out all the gems of his crown !

Second Wise Man. He is haughty and fiery proud,
A spirit not easy to tame.

Fourth Wise Man. There is fear in my heart, and
a cloud
On my soul.

First Wise Man. O my King, when they came,
The people, to speak with the kings
Long ago they were heard.

Third Wise Man. Let him speak,
He is King, and a holiness clings
To the words of a King.

Fifth Wise Man. We are weak,
We are creatures of God, and His will
Is over us all, He alone
Is mighty to save and to spill.

King's Mother. A sword on the steps of the throne
Is lying, and blood on the blade.

Captain. Enough ! Shall we chaffer with speech
As men in a market dismayed,
Shall we take not the thing we may reach
With little of toil ?

For a year
Has the voice of the men of the land
Cried out for a King to hear
Of his grace. For an answer we stand.

It is little enough that we pray,
But here, in the name of the dead,
I swear you shall hearken to-day—
Will you take a queen to your bed ?

Cophetua. It is well. I am bidden to speak,
You are gracious to grant me this thing.
You are strong and you bear with the weak,
You will loosen the tongue of a King.

Second Wise Man. He is haughty and fiery proud.

Captain. No more. There are rumours that go
In the streets—

Cophetua. Unbroken, unbowed,
I give you your answer—I know
Of the rumours and threatening spears,
I know of the sword in the night,
But nothing of pitiful fears,
I will answer,—and hear me aright—
I will not take a queen to my bed,
Though the world should clamour and cry,
Till my will is so shaped. It is said.
You may go—I have spoken it, I.

*[For a moment there is silence. Then mere
assertion gives place to reasoning.]*

First Wise Man. Who shall be king in the end
When you are fallen to sleep,
To whom shall our children look to keep
Peace between friend and friend ?

Cophetua. Your children shall carve a way
To peace with the might of their hands.
Shall they bear to their doors the fruit of the
lands

Because, on a far-off day,
A King of their fathers fell
And sold the gates of his soul
To the rabble ranks for a pitiful dole,
And married his love to hell ?

Second Wise Man. You are haughty and fiery
proud.

Cophetua. The meanest man of you all
May mate where he would. Shall a King then
fall

And tremble before you, cowed,
And be humbled and shorn of fame,
Be called a braggart, a knave,
That he dares no less than a thrall to save
The shrine of his heart from shame ?

Third Wise Man. You are King, and I dare not
cross

My will with a crownèd King's,
But your will so set to your people brings
Peril of branded loss.
There are kingdoms over the seas,
And kingdoms near to your gates,
Whose daughters are moulded for comely mates,

And will you not choose of these,
And gather about your throne
A safety fashioned of might ?

Cophetua

Cophetua. I will break my body to dust in fight,
I am careless of blood and bone,
I will forfeit my latest breath,
I will harry the stranger lords,
I will face unfriended the outland hordes,
I will kiss the lips of death,
I will keep no secret store
Of peace in my house, I will spare
No strength in what things a man may dare
Or men have dared before ;
But the doors of my love shall be
Guarded and unbetrayed,
And reckoning there shall be surely made
'Twixt none but my God and me.

Fourth Wise Man. I fear the striving of men
And the challenge of boasting lips.

Cophetua. Old man, you are nigh to your day's
eclipse,
Would you have in your fancy, when
You pass away to the night,
The strands of a troubled tale
Of a high King setting his love for sale ?

Fourth Wise Man (bewildered merely). The Lord
hath shattered my sight.

Fifth Wise Man. Be it as you have said,
God watches.

Cophetua. He watches well.
I have strayed too near to the gates of hell,
But He watched me, and His hand led.

Captain. You blacken His name. We are proud,
We people, aye, proud as a King ;
You shall rue the day when you chose to fling
Your scorn as pence to the crowd.
We will that a queen should sit
On the King's right hand, and still
We stand as men for the fruits of our will,
Nor abate one word of it.

King's Mother. My son, O my son, be not
Too stubborn—I fear the end,
I fear the day that no days may mend,
And the happening unforgot.
Is it little, my son, you lose ?
There are women with faces fair,
And maddening limbs and shining hair,
And goodly women to choose ;
Women whose kisses would fire
Your lips and quicken your blood,
And set a tumult, a golden flood
In your soul, and a new desire
In the season of scents and stars,
And a sweeter song in the day—

Cophetua. My mother, you have no word to say Cophetua
Of worth. Would you set in bars
The sacred spirit of me ?
No, mother, you know I speak
As a man should speak, but your will is weak
For fear of the things to be.
You are true, my mother, you bring
A deep wise love to the child,—
Let your love be stainless, and undefiled
By craven fears for the King.

Captain. She is wise of her fear—

Cophetua.

Be still—

You are rude, sir, sharpen your tongue
On the steps of a throne whose King is sung
For a poor unkingly will.
I have given my answer ; to each
As he spake I have answered again.
Do you hold me a gibbering clod among men,
To waver and juggle with speech ?

[He moves from the throne to the open doorway at the back.]

For my people, I know them aright,
They will hear me, they hold not in scorn
A man whose flame without fear is borne,
With the wings of the wind in flight.
I will tell them. I wait the call
Of my soul and none else beside ;

I will bring to the hall of their kings a bride
When my choice unbidden fall.

[During the foregoing speeches other Beggars have joined those sitting on the steps. Among them is a Maid. As the King now goes out of the Hall and up the steps to the Temple, the Beggars hold out their hands for alms. The King gives. The Maid, who is seated on an upper step alone, by the door of the Temple, asks nothing. The King pauses for a moment to look at her ; she touches his cloak with her hand, and lifts it to her lips. He passes into the Temple.]

Second Wise Man. He has gone. He is fiery proud.

Third Wise Man. He is King. It is well, it is well.

Fourth Wise Man. There is fear on my heart, and a cloud.

King's Mother. There is building a story to tell—

First Wise Man. He leaves the clear ways that are worn.

Fifth Wise Man. 'Tis the purpose of God—we must bend.

Captain. Not in vain shall he mock us and scorn.

King's Mother. A story—who knows of the end ? Cophetua

Second Wise Man. This day is fulfilled my foretelling.

Third Wise Man. The stars are in counsel with kings.

Fourth Wise Man. There is gloom in the house of our dwelling.

Fifth Wise Man. To God be the shaping of things.

First Wise Man. The thread of the years now is broken.

Captain. To the edge of his sword be the shame.

King's Mother. What word of this day will be spoken ?

What song will be sung of our fame ?

[*The King comes through the Temple doors.*

The Beggars, as before, hold out their hands ; the Maid alone asks nothing.

Cophetua offers her a bag of gold, which she takes ; she rises and stands with the

King at the top of the steps ; she pours the gold from the bag down the steps,

and the Beggars collect the scattered coins. She kisses the bag, and ties it in her

girdle. The King stands looking at her for a moment, then comes down to the

Hall ; he stands by the open doors.

Cophetua. I knelt before God's altar rail,
And something leapt within my brain ;
God's mother smiled ; her beauty pale
Was over me ; and then again
I heard my people crying out,
And woven in the cries of them
I heard a kiss that clung about
The colours of my raiment's hem.

My prayers went up with feathered speed,
But still I saw the face of one
Who said no word of all her need
Among the beggars in the sun,
Of one who sought no little dole
But gave great tribute to her King,
And something fiery in my soul
Stirred with the passion of the spring.

And still I heard my people cry
" A queen, a queen, we seek a queen."
No pride was on my lips, and I
Told God what thing I then had seen,
What rumour through my blood was sent
As I passed through His holy gate,
And surely up to God they went—
My little secret words of fate.

Out of God's house I came. She stood
Before me. She had nought to bring
Of land or warrant counted good
To fire the temper of a King,
Only a treasure in her eyes
Of pure and consecrated days,
And presage that her soul was wise
Of travel in the starry ways.

Cophetua

You counselled me. I heard your words,
Your threats I heard, your cunning speech,
Your clamouring of sheathless swords,
But citadelled beyond the reach
Of all these things my heart was free ;
Yet then a secret word was said
In the blue air. This thing shall be—
A queen is coming to my bed.

Captain. The child of a beggar !

Second Wise Man.

You dare

Lift up this shame in your land ?

First Wise Man. You speak not in wisdom—
beware.

Fourth Wise Man. God give me to understand.

King's Mother. My son, O my son, but wait
A little—how should this be—

A son of proud old kings to mate
With a girl base-born ?

Fourth Wise Man. Ah, me !

Cophetua. How ! Would ye drive me to and fro
As straw beneath the goodman's flail !
God's angels laugh, I think, to know
How much a King's word may avail.
I stand, road-girt, before a sweet
New land of holy joys to-day,
And she alone has led my feet,
And she alone shall say me nay.

"Base-born," you cry—"a beggar's child."
So be it. Yet there haply ran
Some strain of passion undefiled
When in the twilight some tall man
Bore homeward to his bridal bed
Of curling leaves beneath the sky
A clear-limbed girl whose beauty led
Love laughing in captivity.

You bid me mate. And shall it be
To make adultery a thing
Honoured from sea to shining sea
For that the sinner is a King ?
My blood is kingly ? It shall take
A strain of vagrant wind and sun,

I born a King, henceforth will make
The people and the sceptre one.

Cophetua

*[He walks up the steps to the Maid ; he
stands speaking to her, and then leads
her down into the Hall.]*

The Maid. It seemed a very little thing
That you should come and lead me down
Here to your throne. You are a King,
There is a splendour on your crown,
Yet you were born of changing dust
Even as I, and when you spoke
That word to me, the great God thrust
His arm out and the barrier broke,
And I was maid and you were man,
Built of one flesh ; it was as though
No word had been since time began
Of kings and beggars.

Cophetua. And a low
Sweet sound of music fell about
My senses, as of beating wings
Of loves that sway the world without
A thought of beggars or of kings.

The Maid. You are King, and kings are great,
Yet, though I'd kneel before a throne,
My heart would be inviolate—
No king should claim it for his own ;
I worship kingly men, I bow

Before the king's ancestral might,
Yet all these things are nought, and now
No king is standing in my sight.
I see a man who spoke to me
As a man should speak, loving well.

Cophetua. I see a queen whose lips might be
Fashioned great histories to tell.

The Maid. I see a man who set aflame
My womanhood, and made it whole.

Cophetua. I see a holy queen who came
As a great song into my soul.

The Maid. I saw an eagle in the air—

Cophetua. The eagle clove the cloudy ways—

The Maid. Strong winged he was, and proud and
fair—

Cophetua. And there he met the golden rays
Hidden to earth—

The Maid. And far and far
He sped with swift and level flight,

Cophetua. And wrung the glory of a star
Out of the garner of the night.

First Wise Man. Great queens might take her by
the hand,

Third Wise Man. Great kings might kiss her on
the lips,

Fifth Wise Man. God's laughter now is on the
land,

Fourth Wise Man. Light trembles through my Cophetua
day's eclipse,

Second Wise Man. The King establishes his pride,

Captain. I kneel to her, no threat is now
Upon my tongue, she is a bride
To whom a King's folk well may bow.

King's Mother. My child, what way the King
may choose

Is well ; the soul of you is wise,
And a queen's crown will no way lose
Its splendour set above your eyes ;
The word is spoken, and aloud
Along the day as fire it runs,
And you shall bear your King a proud
And comely line of kingly sons.

The Maid. Not dowered as a queen might be
Who sold herself you see me here,
Yet something do I bring for fee,
Good counsel, comfortable cheer,
A body undefiled, a soul
Not alien before the Lord,
A will unbent, a purpose whole,
A passion shining as a sword.

To you in humble-wise, my King,
With nought of fear or servile greed,
My sacred love unsoiled I bring,

My service, and my woman's need.
A story of some careful days
Spent in a cloister no man knows,
Some peace of silent liliated ways,
Some beauty of the curling rose.

*[The King leads her up to the throne. They
stand one on each side of it.]*

Cophetua (to the people). Am I the less a King that
here

I choose as might a man uncrowned,
Or should you hold a queen more dear
For armed men or tribute ground ?
If so it be, the word be said,
And we will pass from out your land,
And sleep upon a stranger bed
And prosper by a stranger hand.

First Wise Man. She too shall pass where queens
have trod,

Third Wise Man. You, being King, have chosen
well,

Fifth Wise Man. Not niggard is the hand of God,

Fourth Wise Man. No veiled fear is now to tell,

Second Wise Man. Now beautiful is all your
pride,

Captain. My sword shall bring you peace alone,

King's Mother. My trouble now is purified,

And love is laughing from a throne.

Cophetua. In the years far away, far away,
Our love shall be told as a song.

Cophetu

The Maid. Many men shall remember, and say—
They kept their love guarded from wrong.

Cophetua. Your beauty shall be as a tale
For the firing of hearts to the end.

The Maid. And never the story shall fail
Of a King who was mighty to lend
A glory to love in his land.

Cophetua. And the children of men unbegot
Shall listen, and understand
The tale of a love unforgot.
Our kiss shall be set on the crest
Of the travelling years, and be borne
As a torch from the east to the west,
Till the sinews of love be outworn.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Rebellion

TO
CATHERINE
AND
LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

THE CHARACTERS ARE—

PHANE, *The King*

MARK, *Chief Councillor*

NUBAR, *Phane's Captain*

COUNCILLORS

A MESSENGER

SERVANTS

NARROS

LEADERS TO THE PEOPLE, *afterwards* CAPTAINS
TO NARROS

A GUARD

SHUBIA, *The Queen*

ACHAIA, *Her Maid*

A BEGGAR WOMAN

WOMEN

Rebellion

ACT I

SCENE I

Audience Room in Phane's palace.

Narros, an alert, able man of thirty, and four Leaders of the People are seated at a table. A Servant stands by a door leading into the farther rooms. It is noon on an early spring day.

There is an impatient pause.

First Leader. Is the king coming ?

Servant.

He is used to come

As he will, not bidden.

Second Leader.

He has summoned us

For this hour. Tell him that we wait.

Servant.

He knows.

First Leader. There is a flavour of insolence in this,

But sharp words shall not sweeten with delay,

And they shall fall sharply upon his ears.

I am uneasy till I have this pride

Of a king to tutor.

Second Leader. Aye, we'll tutor it,

With thorny words—aye, and with limbs if needs be.

We have been slow in speech, but now we'll speak
In authority ; shall we not speak so, Narros ?

Narros. Authority ? Yes ; as you will. Speak
as you will.

First Leader. There's no warm blood in that.

Narros. Yes, set it down

Clearly, this thing you ask ; it is well enough.

First Leader. There is brain in you should be our
piloting—

How is it, when we, overstung with wrongs,
Come sternly to the throne-steps to cry out
On wrong to end, indifference moves in you
Who have sung of freedom till your songs are
known

Of ploughing men and children at the gate ?

Narros. Freedom ? There is no celebration yet
Sung of my lips measures my love of her.

There is about my meditation grown

Service of freedom, none among men may tame.

But this you seek is but a withered flower

Dropped from her girdle in her travelling.

You'd have this yearly tribute lessened ; well ;

I do not bid you no ; ask as you will ;

Claim it, and with straight words ; but do not
spend

Too largely your good energy of life

To gather rights but for that they are rights,

Nor think the still indifference that yields
 Pence to a thieving hand, captivity
 Of spirit. This, the tribute that you pay,
 If measured so, or so, is paid to-night
 And, when the morning comes, not thought upon.
 Shape these things to your will if it may be done—
 But let them be but worth as they are worth.

First Leader. This king has tyrannised, and shall
 we bow

To tyranny and still be unashamed ?
 The time is now to strike, till arms, it may be,
 Fall weary with blows given.

Narros. If it were

For some large liberty, some sanction begged
 That men should labour and laugh not bridled in
 By one man's pleasure, then 't were well to strike
 Till the last breath were told. But these you
 have.

It is but a fretting of life not wholly used,
 This prudent care of peddling privilege.
 You stand for freedom—friends, I'd have you
 guard

Your souls against a tyranny more cunning
 Than any king's; there is a busy pride
 That whispers—"this no strong man may endure
 Without betrayal of himself." It lies.
 The strong man may endure with but a smile

Much that the weak must meet with frenzied words
And loud avowals of their right. If Phane
Denies this that you ask, he wrongs himself,
And it were comely in you to go out
With some proud laughter and leave him with his
wrong.

[There is a movement of dissent among them as Phane comes in, Shubia, her Maid, and Councillors with him. The Leaders rise, while Phane and Shubia move up to their seats. Shubia gives her hand to Narros in recognition: he kneels before her and kisses it. Then all sit.]

Shubia speaks no word throughout the scene, her mood moving between weariness of this and all state disputes and eagerness towards Narros' share in it. From time to time Narros looks towards her.

Phane. Well ?

First Leader. To-morrow we are called to tribute.

Phane. Well ?

First Leader. A tithe of each man's winter labour.

Phane. A tithe, it is so fixed.

First Leader.

And after harvest

A tithe again.

Phane. Aye, then a tithe again.

First Leader. We will not give so much.

Phane. How ! will not give. Rebellion
Who talks of giving, sir ? It is my law.

First Leader. One-twentieth part shall feed your
treasury,
No scruple more. The people send us now
Demanding so.

Phane. Tell them I do not hear.

First Leader. But you shall hear——

A Councillor. Loud-tongued before the throne—
There's treason in your talk.

Second Leader. No, we have done
With careful fear and cornered murmurings,
And now will speak all out.

First Leader. Aye, you shall listen.
Behind us is a multitude shall cry
At the king's wall if we bid it, and more than cry—
It is lusty-armed.

Phane. What—threats : there are whips to use
When servants grow too wilful——

First Leader. Let there be
A care in you, my king, a wildness else
May shake your branches bare.

Narros. Hold up this folly.
Shall so slight argument among us set
Havoc unloosed ? Sire, this thing
They ask might well be heard. Friends, let per-
suasion move

Not stripped of all its courtesy. May we not
Balance this issue with some temperate thought,
And, yielding each to each, each be content ?

Phane. My will is known. I am not used to
yield. [*The Councillors move in assent.*]

First Leader. And we as you are fixed. A
twentieth part,
Or we come back with argument in blood.

Phane. I've that shall answer argument so made,—
But I'll dispute no more in words. You have
A day for reckoning ; you can tell me then
As you will. You know me ; I have men will
quench

This stubbornness if your wisdom cannot rule it.

Narros. These men are baited into hurrying
words

By some unthoughtful pride. But, sire, a king
May too be wrongly proud.

We all are of one house ; turn not away
Begetting wrath when you should help with counsel.

Phane. Your word is no more worth than
another's word.

I have spoken. Do you think for that you are
Reported among men for some trick of the lips,
An ease of rhyme, I am to bow to you,
Unspeakable things I spake. Go, sing your songs,
I have no leisure for traffic with such as you.

Narros. Sire, we are men—both you and I are Rebellion
men,
Fed with one fire. I would not let there be
Anger between us for a little thing.
Given or held the stake that's now between us
Is but a blown wisp on the granary floor,
But there's a humour of civility
That even in trivial talk is not misused.
We do but ask some grace of argument
Till this and that is told——

Phane (rising). I will not hear.
To-morrow is the day. My last is said.

[All have risen.]

Narros. Nay, this is dangerous rudeness. Hear
me then——

To-morrow brings no tribute to your hand.

Phane. Think otherwise before to-morrow come :
It were a prudent thought—or else, my whips.

[Phane, Shubia, and their company go out.]

Narros and the rest remain standing.

First Leader. You heard it—whips ! Now will
you lead us, Narros ?

Will you listen tamely now when he cries us
dogs ?

Narros. But this is chatter of scolds.

Second Leader. If one spit in my face
And I chastise his arrogance, am I a scold ?

Third Leader. It was not much you asked to
make him turn
Saying—I am a king and you a dog.

First Leader. Whips! In God's name, will you
let him babble of whips
As a child might speak of physic to a plaything?
You, freedom's lute, will you go in silence now
Because oppression bids your stops be mute?
No tribute on the morrow—youself have said it,
And you shall lead us then in battle gear.

Narros. He stung me to that word.

Third Leader. There now must be
Answer and pregnant answer to this king,
And you have spoken, and your honour stands
With ours.

Narros. My honour is not of such breed
As a king can bruise or any: let it be.
And still I say this that you wrangle for
Is a slight thing, and not worthy of your strength——

First Leader. Slight thing or no,
It now has taken huge and perilous shape.

Narros. Aye, there's your term. This is the
way of men—
A stubborn word upon some trick of the mind,
And in the mirror of our quarrel grows
An image of the trick of monstrous form,
And then the quarrel takes authority

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From this new phantom that itself has made,
While the old small issue is forgotten quite.

Fourth Leader. And you would scoff as well——

First Leader. Be still I say——

Whips, Narros—and this great king has, forsooth,
No leisure for talk with such as you. And still,
However you may hold it, here's a thing
Asked soberly in reason and refused
Rudely in scorn.

Narros (slowly). Yes—yes, in insolent scorn :
And you did well to ask it. [*There is a pause.*

Well, as you will.

I will stand with you since you'd have it so.

[*There is a sound of acclamation from them all.*

First Leader. Then come. There shall be tidings
straightly sent

Over the land of this. I pledge you all
In freedom's name, and Narros at the head
Of this new page in freedom's chronicle.

[*They place their right hands together.*

Narros (placing his hand on theirs). In freedom's name.

And may the hand that writes
These records down not name us freedom's fools.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

Four months later.

A room in Phane's palace. At the back a wide opening to a terrace, from whence could be seen on the plain in the far distance the camp fires of the King's army and the rebels.

Phane is standing at a table with a large map in front of him. From time to time as he speaks he looks out on to the plain, as though adjusting his plans to facts. Mark, the Chief Councillor, is standing beside him. A Servant stands apart on the terrace. It is near summer midnight.

Phane. By the north river are they?—Still no word?

Servant. No, master: I am watchful.

Phane. , Then one day
Is all we need for safety.

Mark. But one day
Between these rebels and rebellion's due.

Phane. If they should strike before——

Mark. Then, sire, an end
Of kingship and the wisdom of our craft.

Phane. An end—for there they hold us fast as a
bait

Staked and roped by a snare. No tidings yet?

Servant. Master, no word: I've sight is eager.

Phane.

There Rebellion

And there they hold us trapped as a quarry checked
By fangs that wait but till the quarry move.

Mark. We must be very quiet this one day :
Not stir till the beast that watches on our fear
Finds its flank twisted.

Phane. Aye, destroyed
Shall the beast be, not fortunate in death,
But ugly terror mastering its blood—
A day, one short day's bounty—What, no news ?

Servant. No footfall, master.

Phane. Splintering rocks to our feet—
How long has he been gone ?

Servant. Master, five hours.

Phane. Five hours—two hours for travel there
and here,
That's three for learning what may be to learn ;
It is enough ; how if the fool be tricked ?

Mark. Spies have no clock, sire : there is cunning
in this man
That may be trusted.

Phane. Cunning enough : I know.
But all my world waits on the thing he says—
“ They move not yet ”—and I and all of us
Stand proudly from this time on begetting rumours
Shall cross far seas to make men envious—
“ They strike, and now ”—then I and all my state,

My far-descended name, my storied rule,
My populous life—are but an unwholesome tale
For clods who sweep the ashes from the hearth
To jest upon. Five hours may spend a brain.

Mark. You must be patient.

Phane. Kings are patient folk ;
It is the grammar of kingship—was not some word
Spoken down there by the gate ?

Servant. Master, no word.

Phane (rising). Then patience be it. I am very
patient. [*Shubia comes in, with Achaia.*]
Why do you sleep not ? It is not an hour
You should be moving.

Shubia. Still your brabbling here
Sets trivial thoughts against my sleep.

Phane. How—trivial ?

Shubia. What else ? The old reiterated talk
Of state and fended rights and policy,
Chatter of huge heroic issues——

Phane. Still
You reckon up the process of a king
In a scornful word, the sinewy enterprise
Of a state set in peril of evil hands
You name the humour of a pedlar brain.
You are not just, my queen : go to your sleep.

Shubia. Go to my sleep. A child, thrusting
among

The affairs of men, distracting their grave councils, Rebellio
Scolded, not roughly though, and sent to sleep.

Phane. This is not gentle in you. You have
held off

Your care for all my ventures, and I lose
Some half of you I long for. Be it so—
But say not that you are forbid——

Shubia. Your ventures !
I mated with you for some rapture of the blood
I hazarded in your veins, some carelessness
That was to make life venturous, uncribbed
Of scheming overmuch. I dreamt in you
A man should see right through the obscure world
To the core of living, should royally set aside
The dulled and shabby usage of a throne
And strip the king of ceremonial rags
Robing him in new wisdom.

Phane. Still no word

Servant. None, master.

Phane. Shubia, listen,—how shall I,
Being a king, begotten of many kings,
Not travel the appointed way ? And why
Should that safe way be left ?

Shubia. Where does it lead—
Through what starved air that saps the vigour of
men,
Thin foodless air——

Had not this Narros been of so heady breed
All might have prospered in his bargaining.
I would have made some gift in my own time,
But not upon his instant bidding so.

Shubia. Narros I hold not blameless ; he too
failed

In that clear disregard that sets a man
Above the tyranny of considered things.
But he had need, some unsatisfied hunger,
To drive him on. Yet I'd have had him strong
Beyond the uses of kind argument.
The want was not so much, but a counter of living
Coveted by some itch in the blood, not life.
It was not life he wanted.

Phane. There—a step——

[The Servant moves along the terrace.]

Shubia, stay you yet ; there are yet some words
To say between us.

Servant (returning). Master, your messenger.

Phane. Go, tell him I am coming. Go you too :
Keep him apart. *[Mark and the Servant go out.]*

Lady, there's sap in you
Makes praise of lusty men your natural speech ;
I do not blame your blood. And yet you spoke
A little more than kind of Narros then.

Shubia. Almost—I think—I love him——

Phane. A care, my queen,

A care in this. The office of a throne
May keep me from the outward courtesies
That my love prompts, yet is my love not stale,
Nor leanly-loined, my Shubia ; if I caught
One whisper there's a fierceness bidding in me
Would throttle—but there, your mind in idleness
Because of its refusal to my call
Turns to a fancied lightness. Be content—
My love shall yet go ceremonially.

Shubia. So the thronged mind stoops that I may
understand.

Listen : I will be plain. Had Narros been
Driven right on by that high carelessness
That eager appetite for unshackled life
Whereof he is half built, had he but seen,
As save for ill counsel he might, being a poet,
That all these little energies of law
Were but queer motes eddying over life,
He had such virtue else, I would have given
My love to him to the measure of his asking.

Phane. His asking, say you ?

Shubia. Oh, yes, he has asked,
With dangerous beautiful words. But this one
thing

He lacked, but this one thing to make him whole.

Phane. You cunning harlot !

Shubia. Cunning ? Is it so,

To speak in the open thus ? Harlot ? I seek
Love that my life cries out for. Harlotry ?
So, if you will. You great kings have strange
thoughts.

Phane. Shubia, why not that love in me ? I
stand

In a great danger ; no man now can say
How will the issue of this battling turn—
Let me go on clean-humoured in my toil
Not frenzied with this springing fear of you.
I would give all you seek——

Shubia. It is not yours
For giving : you have no mastery of life,
Your robes of life are bare, not even patched.

Phane. Then let this Narros look to himself, if
he fail.

My clutch is spiny—let him look to himself.

[*Going out along the terrace.*]

So now, your news. . . .

Shubia. These pregnant rulers of earth.

Achaia. You are brave, and with a king too.

Shubia. Little enough.

[*A Beggar Woman appears on the terrace.*

She has been watching until the King went.

The Woman. He goes to hear stark news.

Shubia. Now, grandmother gossip,
What keeps you from your sleep under the rick ?

The Woman. We whose wits are bread let sleep Rebellion
go by
When the night's big with news.

Shubia. What do you know ?

The Woman. Who travels the road brings many
tales to net.

They have their price.

Shubia (giving her money). A penny for a
fancy.

Make it a proud tale.

The Woman. These are no made tales.

I weave not ; only watch. There is an end
Coming to Phane. Narros goes out at dawn
To crown his battles. The king is in the snare.

Shubia. Who knows the chance of battle ?

The Woman. Who has eyes
Can read the chance. Phane's captains are shut up
In long forked ridges of Narros' soldiery.

There is no chance. There is for this dawn made
One simple telling ; a bad end for the king.

Shubia. So then : what matter ? How do you
know this ?

It is no matter neither. How do you know ?

The Woman. I was by Narros' tent when these
things passed.

I stored his words for you, minding the day
You praised him as we talked and no one near.

Shubia. How did he speak ? All the old virtue
gone
With trading in things of waste ?

The Woman. That is strange speech,
As strange almost as his.

Shubia. How strange as his ?

The Woman. He called his captains round him,
and before

Were marshalled all his rebel arms. I think
Never were words so difficult put to men
Standing before death's finger lifted up.
"My friends," he said—his voice was measured well,
Persuasive, nowise loud—"at dawn we go
To harvest these long months of husbandry.
The end is certain ; they are given to us.
Hereafter is our having as our will
In all for which our battle has been made.
But now before the end I tell you this :
The wage is lean for the great labour spent.
You urged me to your leading, and I came,
And, coming, was a fool. I have turned aside
And spent myself in the cunning craft of men
Who think much pitiful hurrying to and fro,
The getting of some straightly forgotten right,
The twisting of laws that govern a yearly day,
Swift rigorous life. You called me out to compass
Ends not imagined of my spirit—well,

I came and they are compassed, but henceforth
 I will have no man flatter—Thus did Narros,
 This he accomplished, that he laboured for ;
 I will not father acts that are not mine.
 From dawn thenceforth enough of fevered doing.
 Waste in her gaudy garment cries aloud
 For service—I see through the fluttering veils
 And know her barren ; let her ride on the wind,
 I'll none of her. Henceforth I will be Narros."

Shubia. So was his speech ?

The Woman. 'Twas a strange battle-cry.

Shubia. Strange as a god's. How far to Narros'
 tent ?

The Woman. An hour.

Shubia. There's payment for an age ;
 Go swiftly with these words for him alone—
 " Shubia waits at the foot of the grey hills,
 At the place that once was spoken in a song,
 Till one shall come to her." For him alone.

The Woman. I have the trick of secrecy.

[*She goes.*

Shubia.

At last

There comes into my loneliness of life
 A master for its quickening, at last——

Achaia. Madam, is this your cunning for my lord ?
 You aid him so.

Shubia. How aid him ?

Achaia. If Narros come
The king's fall is not yet.

Shubia. I do not count
His fall as more than the chatter among the eaves.
I have had no care but the life that has called to me
Each day for my free sanction. Now it cries
With a proud new burning of authority
And I am but to answer.

[Phane comes to the table, speaking as he comes. Mark, the Messenger and Servants are with him.]

Phane. Bid them come
On your word. Set there on the wall the torch
To summon Nubar. At dawn you say. Three
hours.

What profit in three hours? You heard aright?

The Messenger. I stood by Narros, but an arm
length—so. *[A Councillor comes in.]*

Phane. Ill news, ill news. How long should
Nubar be?

Mark. His tent is nearest on the plain.

Phane. At dawn—
'Twas dawn—you heard it—certainly at dawn?

The Messenger. At dawn.

Phane. How did he speak it?

The Messenger. In constraint,
As though not eager, yet not doubtfully.

Phane. What said he else ?

The Messenger. Only some stubble of words
Queerly preaching of waste as the evil thing,
Some talk of their striving as waste—I could not
take him.—

Not soldierly, to my mind.

Phane. Hesitant was he ?
As not glad in his will—uneasy, eh ?
That's better, Mark, that's better news.

The Messenger. His talk
Ruled not his will in this : he is fixed for dawn.

Phane. Dawn. You are sure this dawn ? To-
morrow dawn
Were good. Was't not to-morrow dawn ?

The Messenger. The dawn that now is coming.

[*Two other Councillors come in.*]

Phane (to a Councillor). Old man, old man,
Why is there so much wickedness in dawn ?

Councillor. How wickedness ?

Phane (rising). Where are the rest of you ?
Where Nubar ? Sit. Ill news is over us
Like a black eagle. Sit. I'll tell you all
When they come. Are they sent for ?

Mark. All of them are summoned.

Phane. Prepare these till they come. I will be
with you.

Shubia, the night calls you to sleep. Go in.

Some word of love before you go. I stand
Against fate rising terribly before me,
And the sharp spade is sheer upon my roots.
Dawn's fingers write my last of sceptred health,—
Give me some word : I have loved you : you alone
May be my kingdom in an hour or two.
Give me this courage. Say you are mine, all mine.

Shubia. I cannot be your inn at the dusty end
Of fear's long road.

Phane. Go in—go in—
And be the devil grinning through the dawn
Of my calamity. [*Shubia and Achaia go.*
That horseman—eh—

Is it Nubar ?

Another Councillor (entering). It is Nubar come.

Phane. That's well,
If well be still in use.

[*Nubar comes in. He takes a seat at the table
with the Councillors : Phane at the head,
the map before him. The Messenger
stands by Phane. A Servant at each end
of the terrace.*

Do you know the cause
Of this ?

Nubar. It is not hard to pattern out.

Phane. Narros at dawn strikes. Well, can you
answer that ?

Nubar. We have one answer.

Rebellion

Phane. What ?

Nubar. There is none
but death.

Phane. No wile to hold them back one day ?

A Councillor. Your craft

Of battle, Nubar, is rarer than its praise.

Nubar. Its praise is done. My craft is but to
die now.

Phane. Our neighbours bring three thousand
men before

Night comes again.

Nubar. If Narros strike at dawn

They will come to a great burying. 'Tis dawn ?

Mark. This man has heard it.

Phane. Flight, not here, nor here ?

Nubar. No passage to a score of men.

A Councillor. Some hours

Of truce.

Nubar. The reason ?

Another Councillor. Shape some tale of sickness,
Some sudden pestilence.

Nubar. Narros is no child.

Another Councillor. This man, you say, heard
Narros speak ?

Phane. He heard.

The Councillor. Was he near him ?

Phane.

But an armlength.

The Councillor.

And again

He might be so ?

Phane.

Your meaning ?

The Councillor.

A swift knife

Would keep dawn silent.

Phane.

Do you hear that ?

The Messenger.

Sire, I hear.

Phane. Might it be so ?

The Messenger.

'Twere an ill thing to do

If done, yet I have lost all niceness

In service of these days, and an ill thing

Is but a fly-blow on a rotten pond.

It should be done if it might, but it's past
doing.

Phane. How past it ?

The Messenger.

When I stood before I was
one

In a thronged multitude. Now they are quiet,

The captains watch apart or sleep till dawn ;

Narros is guarded ; I going should be known,

And, known, destroyed ; Narros is loved among
them.

A Councillor. Yet chance might help.

The Messenger. There is no chance in this,

The end is certain.

Nubar.

The man speaks knowing it is so.

Phane. Go, try. A chance in the wind is still a Rebellion chance.

The Messenger. That is your bidding ?

Phane. You heard it.

Bring me news
Of Narros' death, and finish as you will.

The Messenger. There death is taloned maybe
with some shame,
Hidden, unknown. Here is death only. I
Have been a crook'd slave, going to all men's wills,
A sorry tale-bearer, scarred in the womb,
Now done is my poor pennyworth of words.

[*He stabs himself.*

Nubar. And still dawn comes.

Phane. Carry him out.

[*The dead Messenger is borne out.*

God's eyes !

Can none among you find a way ?

Nubar. When time
Calls the full hour the full hour strikes.

A Councillor. Send out
The thunder of Phane's great captains.

Nubar (rising). Thunder of whelps.
Old prater, I am not a drunken mob
For frenzy of huge words. Have you said all
out ?

If so, farewell. I go. My date is set

But two hours' lease from now. It is enough.
I shall not turn my vizard down to death.

[*Achaia comes in.*

Achaia. Master, a word.

Phane. There is no worth in words.

Achaia. The queen—I heard it all. I should be
dumb

Being her woman, but danger were in this
silence.

She has sent word to Narros.

Phane. Word to Narros?

Achaia. Bidding him meet her at the grey hill's
foot.

Phane. When?

Achaia. Even now she is ready for the hills.

Phane. Go, have the doors made fast. How
sent she word?

Achaia. A beggar woman passed.

Phane. And the message, eh?

Achaia. "Shubia waits at the foot of the grey
hills,

At the place that once was spoken in a song,
Till one shall come to her."

Phane. Quick—one on horse—
After the crone. I'll singe this harlotry,
There shall be torments for it.

Mark. There are lucky kings—

Is Phane not of them ? Narros away at dawn— Rebellion
Is that not lucky ?

Phane. Narros away at dawn.

That's good. That's mighty news. But make the
doors fast.

Let him go and find no apple on his bough.

A Councillor. A barren tree keeps no man.

Phane. How—what's that ?

Mark. There must be fruit for plucking.

Phane. Must be ?

Mark. Must.

He will return else. Narros loves the queen ?

Phane. You, pestilent, yes.

Nubar. He will not go to her now.

Achaia. The woman told us how he'd spoken of
life

Before his arms, saying that he would take

Its fulness without care of trivial things—

As the queen often speaks. The queen's face
gladdened

At that, and then she sent that word to him.

Phane. As the queen often speaks ; then he will
go.

It's a lusty madness in them.

Mark. And still unwrecked

Are you because of it. He will be there

Till the sweet core is tasted and dawn's gone by.

Phane. Let them be taken there.

Nubar. There are many paths
And the hills are wide and secret. Be but patient ;
To-morrow brings them to your punishment.

Phane. Might we not find him going ?

Nubar. In the night ?

Phane. Follow the queen—we take him.

Mark. There's a risk
He twists out of our hands, and dawn
Then takes its toll still. There is but one way
To safety—to let them go, and patiently.

A Councillor. So Phane's throne stands.

Phane. And Phane's love is a scorn
Henceforth to men.

Mark. Nay, but a thing laid down
For the whole state's redeeming.

Phane. What lacks in me
That a woman should go by me ? Am I not
Qualitied as a man drawn out of kings ?
I have spared nothing.

Mark. Women have testy blood—
There are queens to find shall make this Shubia
seem

A spent ash in the sunlight. Shall they go ?

Phane. There is shame in this.

Mark. Not your shame. Shall they go ?

A Councillor. It is the state.

Phane (after a pause, to *Achaia*). Go, speak no Rebellious word of this.

Achaia. But shall I thus——

Phane. What, questioning? Take her aside.

[She is taken out, guarded.]

Nubar (taking the map from Phane, who makes no movement). Three thousand men by night-fall ?

Mark. Aye, three thousand.

Nubar. Passing this dawn, Narros will not then
strike

Till dawn again. They come between those hills;
They shall halt there, and we can move a line
Up to them so. That's good. That's what we
need,

That cover against the rebels there.

Phane (rising). What, plans,
Plans, plans! Can they not wait an hour?

Nubar. It is the manner of war.

[Shubia comes in. She moves towards the terrace.

Phane. Still from your bed ?

Shubia. The night's uneasy for your chattering.
I shall not sleep.

Phae. Not sleep ! So, bragged in my face.
[*She moves towards the terrace.*]

Where do you go ?

Shubia. There is quiet along the walks.

Phane. What walks ? What walks ?

Shubia. How, am I questioned now
If I lift the latch at nightfall?

Phane. Do I seem
Spun in the wits that thus you—

Mark. Sire, these plans
Are urgent and times goes—*(with his finger on map)*
do you forget

This need ?

Phane. Forget? Ah, yes—the need.
Go to your walking—out of our clamour's reach.

[Shubia goes out.]

Nubar. And then we strike them, out of the valley, thus.

Phane. Go with a blinding fury and crush them,
Nubar.

But bring me Narros safe. I have use for him.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

Rebellic

SCENE I

Narros' tent, the front open. A Guard watches outside before a waning fire. Within, Narros is sleeping. For a few moments there is silence. Then a Captain comes in. It is two hours before dawn.

The Captain. Is he awake ?

Guard. I think not.

Captain. See.

[The Guard goes into the tent. Narros turns at the sound.]

Narros. Who's that ?

Guard. 'Tis I.

Narros. Ah, yes. How long have I slept ?

Guard. Two hours.

Narros. Two hours ; then two till dawn. Is all made ready ?

Captain (entering tent). By every fire I've gone.

All sleep, and by each hand

Lie shield and spear and sword. I never knew

Arms so well ordered against a coming battle.

I had not wondered, after those words you spoke

If discontent had loosened them.

Narros.

To men, with death about them, spare, strung words,
Not flattering any, sobers and knits them up ;
You need not fear. What else ?

[The Beggar Woman is seen standing outside the tent.

Friend, your soil

Bears or is barren beyond my rule or any.
The order of battle is clear ?

Captain.

To a man.

Narros.

Then thrive

On my gift as you may hereafter. What's that in the shadow?

Guard. Back. Where are you prowling ?

The Woman.

I'm to speak with Narros.

Narros. He hears.

The Woman.

Alone.

The Captain.

A care of murderous hands.

The Woman. There is no danger in these.

Narros.

Leave us alone.

Come presently again.

[The Captain goes.]

Stand you aside.

[The Guard moves a few paces away.]

And now, your word.

The Woman. A little time gone by Rebellion
I stood there while you spoke. It was strange
speech.

Narros. That's no great news to carry in the night.

The Woman. I carried it.

Narros. Be plain.

The Woman. One had it of me,
Who praised it, saying——

Narros. Come—what is your word ?

The Woman. “Shubia waits at the foot of the
grey hills,
At the place that once was spoken in a song,
Till one shall come to her.”

Narros. How—Shubia—waits ?
She told you this ?

The Woman. The words as I tell again.

Narros. But when ?

The Woman. She is not sluggish in her doing.
She is moving towards the hills.

Narros. Now ?

The Woman. Even now.

Narros. The night wants but two hours for dawn.

The Woman. I know.

Narros. There is a reckoning fixed for dawn.

The Woman. I know.

Narros. You told her that ?

The Woman. I told her as you spoke.

Narros. And she ?

The Woman. She bade me tell you as I do.

Narros. That's clean rebellion, that. Not
cracked in the throat

With haggling over the way the puppets dance,
But a good clean cry that she will choose her own,
And let all hear who may. There was no word
Of—let this pass, and then, or—will he come ?

The Woman. No word but those I spoke.

Narros. She knew me then.

My Captains—call them.

*[The Guard moves about swinging a lantern,
high up.]*

The bravery of spirit in her
Knew me. That's a good thought, full of honour.
“At the place that once was spoken in a song.”
There's payment, with my thanks.

[A Captain comes in.]

Captain. What is it moving ?

Narros. You have done well ; good speed.

[The Woman goes out.]

Captain. Is any trouble

Among us ?

Narros. None but the sweet fierce trouble of life.

[The First Captain and two others come in.]

First Captain. You call us ; why ?

Narros. I cannot lead at dawn.

First Captain. How cannot ?

Narros. You must choose another.

Second Captain. What ?

Third Captain. Are you bemused with sleep ?

Narros. No, not bemused.

Second Captain. Another. How should it be—
there is none among us.

Narros. Then it must wait.

First Captain. What wait ? Our plan set back
When all is ordered ?

Narros. That, or another leads.

Second Captain. What trick of the mind is this ?

Narros. I told you all
How this was priced in my brain. Now comes to
me

A call out of the life I spoke of then,
And now must be my answer.

First Captain. Is it well
To anger men who stand at the end of labour,
Wrenched with their toiling—hungry for the
wage ?

Battle at dawn is fixed.

Narros. Then choose among you.

First Captain. You are sworn.

Narros. Light things are lightly sworn.
Yet did I swear not. Albeit, had I sworn
I would forswear it now.

Second Captain. There is fire among us
That none but you may feed.

Narros. Then hold your battle
Till dawn again, and I will serve you then.

First Captain. Delay might cost us all.

Narros. You have them penned.
They cannot move a stone's pinch.

Third Captain. Be delay
Safe or unsafe why should we delay ?

Narros. Because I will. I am called, and I go,
and now.

Fourth Captain. The going may be treacherous.
[*There is a murmur of reproof against this from the others.*]

Narros. It may be.
I ask no trust. This fight is nothing to me,
Because it spells out nothing in the end,
But I have said the end should be my care,
And still it shall if you will it, but not this dawn.
To-morrow dawn, or battle unled of me—
No more's to say.

First Captain. How if we held you here ?

Narros. You will not. Narros held a captive among you—
These men count something by my wisdom and love me.
There would be question readier than belief.

Second Captain. If it is told——

Rebel

Narros. I have done with argument.

Do I return, or no ?

First Captain. If yes, you may
Fail us again once having failed.

Narros. You chose
This dawn and I was willing, caring not
If this or that. And any other dawn
My will had stood.

First Captain. You said you had forsworn
Had oath been given.

Narros. I said it and I say.

First Captain. If now you swear, you still may be
forsworn

Narros. Then I'll not swear.

First Captain. You will not ?

Narros. Well, I'll swear,
If it will ease you.

First Captain. Then, to-morrow dawn.

Narros. To-morrow dawn.

First Captain. What between now and then ?

Narros. I'd have you spend it with some zest.

Let some
Keep watch in turn, and all the rest be given
Good wine for laughter and let song be among you.
Let life go free this day. I do not think
You have the trick of it rightly : it is starved

Because of the lean cattle in your brain.
But I would have you learn it, if it might be.
There's profit in it that you do not dream.
[*He throws a cloak over himself and goes out.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

*A rocky place on the open moors. Shubia is sleeping.
Narros watching her. It is some hours past dawn.
There is silence before Narros speaks.*

Narros. Its dues were done . . .
The rebels in whose bone and brain—
Its dues were done . . .

The dragons of my mind have fed
On the sharp berries that are grown
Where no wise word is ever said,
Where, marrowed as the boughs of spring,
Foolhardy love goes wandering
With love alone.

And there the eagles of desire
Cry up the wind in sinewy flight,
Not shamed of the immoderate fire

That feeds the crucibles of lust,
And there the ploughs of reason rust
In reason's night.

Rebelli

When the green woods and unquelled seas
Burn up in the disastrous sun
Our laughter shall be glad of these,
And ranging life shall know again
The rebels in whose bone and brain
Its dues were done.

Shubia. That's bravely made.

Narros. I thought you were asleep.
I made it now for you.

Shubia. I love your songs ;
They are so of your fibre.

Narros. Praised of you,
They are good songs.

Shubia. That is not flattery,
For beauty has its laurels to bestow,
And I am beautiful,—am I not beautiful, Narros ?

Narros. The beauty of things made where chaos
was,
The starlight on the sickle in the corn.

Shubia. Are you content ?

Narros. Content is minister
To the cripples of passion, yet I am content.

Shubia. Immoderate love——

Narros. Is the grain of the thriving wood.

Shubia. You take my words.

Narros. There are men dazed in the world
Would sift the lust of the blood from the holy joy
That gives the soul its pride, I'd none of them—
They are the reins that curb the thundering
hooves

That plunge right to the goal.

Shubia. Aye, blood to blood,
Lithe limb to limb, the soul laughs out at that,
The soul is master then, the untamed soul.

Narros. Woman, you health among the springing
corn.

Shubia. You strong thews of the reaping
husbandman.

Narros. If I should fail in love ?

Shubia. It were enough
That love had made immortal one brief hour,
One period snatched out of the measured void
Men live by.

Narros. I think I will not fail in love.

Shubia. A good thought, salty. Yet, should
all hours be lost,
We have had one hour.

Narros. One hour that not the gods
Can cancel.

Shubia. Narros, I have given you all,
The sum of me, yet giving you all there's more,
Long service yet to make—it shall be yours.

Narros. I have been a god omnipotent for an
hour.

Shubia. Yet these are the harsh crusty loaves
of love,
The dull and careful symmetry of love,
Love yet has all its ritual to tell.

Narros. I would not have you promise anything
Nor bid my faith be sworn. What is to come
Shall gladly come our spirits being supple,
Or beggared if they crack. The sick mind looks
Into the measure of to-morrow's cruse,
And lusty life is an immortal now.
To-day shall be our token and to-day,
Till all to-days are shepherded in sleep,
And here shall never be the slave of there.
If love should lean upon the arms of hope
We'll go our separate ways, not looking back,
And leave love to its burial alone.

Shubia. I would be strong to that if that should
fall,
Yet without sin I'll think it shall not be.

The dragons of my mind have fed
On the sharp berries that are grown

Where no wise word is ever said,
Where, marrowed as the boughs of spring,
Foolhardy love goes wandering
With love alone.

Your word of battle—must you answer it ?

Narros. It is my last of argument among them ;
This once, and there an end. I promised it.

Shubia. What matter, when fools quarrel, how
it goes ?

Has either side a special righteousness
When both but scream as gulls among the styes
When the pigs have gone ? What is their clamour
for ?

What shall the victor carry with him ? Offal—
Some barren right not worth a day's remembrance.
And what have we to do with such as these ?

And there the eagles of desire
Cry up the wind in sinewy flight,
Not shamed of the immoderate fire
That feeds the crucibles of lust,
And there the ploughs of reason rust
In reason's night.

Can we not leave them to their vanities ?

Narros. Shubia, but one day more.

Shubia. It might be death.

Narros. We must not fear it. And my service Rebellion
done

For the last time then in the hovels of the mind,
We'll go together our free ways and learn
The peace of the wild hawks among the rocks.

Shubia. I will not think that death shall touch you
yet,
And so I'll watch you shift the harness off
That hired men wear and will not be afraid.
But I have heard so many years the tale
Of thrift and have housed with unadventurous craft
So long now that I weary. I would swing
The straight oar now till the sun burns on my skin
The pressure of his old barbarous covenant.
I am eager for you, Narros, where are told
No more the meagre prudencies of men
Who clothe destruction in authority,
And labour with loud words of barren things
That should be served in the strong life of the world
Between the wine and the sweeping of the crumbs.
I have known a world most worthy to be lost,
And the gossip of it shall be no more to us
From this day than the sound of a broken dish
Rattled among the scourings of the house.

When the green woods and unquelled seas
Burn up in the disastrous sun

Our laughter shall be glad of these,
And ranging life shall know again
The rebels in whose bone and brain
Its dues were done.

*[As she is finishing the Beggar Woman has
come in.]*

Narros. What now ?

The Woman. A horseman riding out of the north
Goes down to Phane.

Narros. What horseman ?

The Woman. One who bears
News of Phane's friends, three thousand of them,
armed.

They will be with Phane by noon.

Narros. Your warrant of this ?

The Woman. He asked how Phane or Nubar
should be met.

I led him to your lines, and as we went
His tongue was free, I being but a beggar.

Your captains hold him now.

Narros. Three thousand, armed.

Shubia. And still you go ?

Narros. I go.

Shubia. I would have it now,
I would not stay you now. It was for me
That you left the gates open to this new danger.

I am glad of that. Yet if you told me now
That they should ply this hubbub out alone,
I would not blame you. Yet I'd have you go.

Narros. It was an oath ill-sworn, but I will go
To its keeping as to a ceremony held
At the parting with an old worn way of life.
You shall come with me and watch this faring out,
And we will leave them to their bargaining
When the bargaining time is come. These men
or those

It matters little for whom the box may throw—
They both would spend their profit ill enough ;
But, if it stead them, I think that these I lead
Shall have their will. Phane's fortune in this thing
Is past the cure of any who come to him.
I would have them spare this thriftless use of blood
But they would count their manhood stained in
that.

Their manhood. How they strut on the quays of
the world.

And the great ships of life go quietly on
And never call them to their company.
Three thousand ?

The Woman. Armed, at noon.

Shubia. Almost I fear—
There is a stroke might be so terrible.
But I'll not fear.

Narros. Come. Now is but one dawn
Between us and an immortal mastery.
[*They go, the Woman remaining.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The Scene as in Act I Scene II. Phane and a Councillor are seated at the table, following by the map the progress of the battle on the plain below, Mark and other Councillors watching from the terrace. It is two hours after dawn on the following day. The curtain rises as there is a lull in the battle. Mark and the others straining over the terrace wall.

Phane (after a pause). Well ?

Mark. They are lost in the trees.

Phane. Not yet the end.

They have had two hours—six thousand against four.

This neighbour strength—was not Nubar confident
Of a swift issue with that ?

Mark. The chance of war
Goes as a bird's flight through a wood.

Phane. And yet, Rebellion
Six thousand against four should master chance.
I gave up all for this, and now there comes
Doubt on the lips of promise.

A Councillor. Nubar falls
As driven rain on their line—that's good—that's
good.

Phane (moving to the terrace). Ah! strike them—so!

Mark. They fail—they break—they are scattered.

Phane. That's a great fighting!—swing—and
the shoulder's length!

Let them bite on the edge—harry them—harry
them—

They shall sweat in a beautiful penance now.

A Councillor. See—an arm comes striking out
of the north.

Mark. They are rebels—no—they are——

Phane. At the back of them—
They are closing down on the back of them.
(*Shouting*) Nubar! Nubar!

God, and the tide goes back, again, again.

[*He moves back to the table.*]

A Councillor. They are lost in a fury of swords.

Mark. See, see—that's brave.
Nubar is out of the net—he throws them back—
They dispute in companies—see, they cover the
plain.

Phane (tearing the map). I'll spend no further brain till the thing is known.

[There is a lull again. Phane paces up and down.]

A Councillor. They gather again to opposing ranks. At last

They are thinning surely—the weight is falling upon them.

Phane. Thrive hawk, thrive hare. Blow your thistles in autumn.

A Councillor. Who are those that come towards us?

Another Councillor. They are bringing a captive.

A Councillor. Who is it?

Another. Some rebel of note.

Mark. It is Narros.

Phane (moving to the terrace). Narros!

That's balm in a poisonous wind. Is it Narros surely?

Mark. It is he. I know that heedless insolent stride.

Phane. Narros. There's comfort in that.

A Councillor. And Nubar goes

Momently like a pointed danger now

Among the rebels; the good hour comes to us.

Phane. Narros for me, and the day mine. It sets for me—

Look—is it not shaping so?

Mark. It is shaping well, Rebellion
All the gear of the battle works for you.

Phane. They bring him. Here I'll listen. I'll
judge him here.

Check any mercy of mine. But I'll not have mercy.
Be seated all save you—you watch the faring.

*[The Councillors take their seats at the
table, Phane standing at the head. Mark
watches from the terrace. Narros is
brought in, bound.]*

Phane. So—come ill, come well, my bird is in
the snare,

My amorous bird, my thief-bird, wing-clipped, ha !
Do you know a rebel's food ? It sticks in the throat,
It slackens the limbs and puts the eyes to sleep.

Narros. Death ; I am ready.

Phane. Aye, tormenting death,
A gibbering playful death.

Narros. A little time,
And still but death. I am ready.

Phane (moving to him). Should I spit
In the face of a rebel—thus, it were too gracious.
You carrion anger moving in the state,
Have you no guile of words before the end ?

Narros. I have done with words.

Phane. No creeping oaths of love ?

Narros. Is your torment ready ?

Phane. Is not my face as fair
As that, or masterful as those these thews ?
Have I not eyes as eager as those that peer
On the close coming of death ? Does not this frame
House a passion as lusty—Where is the queen ?

Narros. Ay, there's a spice to the hatred of
rebellion.

Shubia from my tent watches this battle out.

Phane. What now ?

Mark. Still moving for us.

Phane. In your tent,
Stowed in your tent as precious merchandise,
You foulness, in your tent. Still as we would ?

Mark. All seems for us.

Phane. You hear—it is to our hand.
They will bear in the spoils, rare, lucky spoils,
There will be a zest in sorting out the spoils.
Good laughing zest, eh ? I think we'll keep you
yet

Against her coming : then shall be an end
For love to feed on. I would not have her miss it.
She has cried out for life and unreined blood—
She shall have it, ay, her wild senses shall surfeit.

Narros. Is all said now ?

Phane. Was it not something hard
To go from such sweet traffic to the field ?

Narros. Hazarding for a baseless broil of fools

Wisdom that leaves your brain outstripped, 'twas Rebellion
hard.

Almost I came not, but I had an oath,
A clinging burr on the hem of honour's gown,
That teased me into coming.

Phane. So the bait served.

Narros. The bait ?

Phane. We had it all—do you know the text ?
“ Shubia waits at the foot of the grey hills,
At the place that once was spoken in a song,
Till one shall come to her.”

Narros. That was a cunning throw.

Phane. We tricked you of a day and crush you
by it.

Narros. Well tricked, as a great proud heart.

For the lust of state
You practise with the thing you love, the bound
And summit of your loving you make a pawn ;
Your loving ! You poor huckster at the booths
In the lazar corners of the city of life.

Phane. But free, not trussed in the arms. Is
it well ?

Mark. They sweep far over the plain. All is
confused.

Nubar, I think, is near to the reckoning.
He is grinding down to the ragged seams of the
sack.

Phane. Good, very good. Listen. You flee
at me

Because I have not this pat carriage of slyness
To prosper my having in love. Well, show it me.
Make me free of this crafty fellowship,
Tutor the dulness that you rail upon,
Tell me the uses of this manner of love,
And it shall ease your end. I'll even fail
In justice for the lesson.

Narros. Phane, you are dead,
Dead in the wits as the soul.

Phane. You cry me dead—
You cry it! You, an itch in the side of death
That the claws of death but now are seeking out,
You cry me dead! (*Moving back to the table*)

Speak, all of you. You know
The tale of this man's treason. Shall death not be
His measure, and shall there be pity in his death?
Is there among you any plea of mercy?

An Old Councillor. Young man, I have no voice
but the voice of all.

Yet once I was your playfellow. How came
This madness in you? It is a twisted grief
Upon my age for some old memories
I have of your clean boyhood. Is there nothing
For you to say before the end?

Narros.

This king

Being so mazed in the stupor of his senses
Should have no word from me : but you have been
A gentleness about me, and I'd have
You keep some fashion of the truth of me
However you may read it. I heard this king and
all of you

In lean and patchy argument, as who
Should bear this right or that, who carry in
And who go laden forth, what gain should be
Marked for this trading, what forfeiture for that,
How should the tithes be reckoned, should those ships
Be chartered so, divided so the spoils
Of each man's labour. And I sickened then
For a state should foster in a man the will
For life not netted in these prudencies.
I saw life simple, and you peopled it
With idiot ghosts that would not let me rest
Till I too mouthed it, and denied myself.

Phane. Is it near the end ?

Mark. The end is hidden yet.

Narros. But yesterdawn the old joy came back to
me.

The old high-gaited wrath, and Shubia came.
And I was careless of this battle faring,
And now am careless of it. These I led
As you are thronged in the brain with a thousand
things,

And let life pass them tattered by the door.
What matter whose the mastery ? Had I lived
I would have served my eagerness of body,
My lust of the day's colour and air and sound,
My hunger for beauty shaped out of the earth,
My pride of song, my charities of home,
And let your wrangling be no more to me
Than a webbed fly swinging underneath the
thatch.

Phane. And yet ?

Mark. Not yet.

Phane. And all that will not take
One pang from death.

Narros. Not one.

Phane. Is death the word ?

[*The Councillors lift their hands in assent.*
And you ?

Mark. Ay, death.

Phane. And torment, is it not so ?

The Old Councillor. Death were enough.

Phane. What, treason to the state,
To the king's body, even to his own cause—
Is death enough ?

Mark. It should be torment.

Phane (moving to Narros). So ;
The doom is on you. Now you slanderer
Of the holy use of state, you scorner of law,

You rank thing swearing by life, you ruttish Rebellior
beast—

Is death well-featured ?

Narros. It is a crushing out
Of beauty, a loss of savours wonderful.
My last of griefs, frustrating pregnant years
Of splendour. I fear it. Are you satisfied ?
Have you said all yet ?

Phane. I'll keep him here
To watch, for pleasure, till the spoils come in.
Death shall have audience.

Narros. I would spare her that
If any plea might serve ; but I'll not plead.
She will not be among fear's pensioners.

Mark. They are driven in flight. Slaughter is
on them all.

Phane (on the terrace). At last, at last. Nubar,
that's my Nubar !
Let them be smoke ravelled along the wind.

[*The Councillors move to the terrace.*]

A Councillor. There's a bright coiling of battle.

Phane. Scatter and scatter.

Another Councillor. Death flashing upon them.

Another. The masterful fury of death.

Phane. Drive them towards us, bring the
slaughtering near us,
Nubar, my captain, there shall be feasting for this.

Mark. There's honour for Phane in this, and travelling news.

Phane that we long have served, new honour for Phane.

A Councillor. Our master, Phane!

Another. Great Phane!

Another. Phane the great king!

The Councillors. Phane the prevailing! Phane!
Cry honour to Phane.

Mark. Still as swept leaves they come. Nearer, nearer. (*A pause.*)

God!—do you see?—do you see?—it is Nubar driven!

Phane. Blind eyes! (*a pause*)—It is—it is—
My curse on Nubar.

Is there no sinew left among them all?

They fall—they are trampled—God, and is this the ending?—

Crushed, we are crushed—do you see?—they are crushing us.

[*Cries are heard in the distance. Phane comes down to Narros.*]

Come, one of you a knife—I'll have some payment; I'll not be tricked of all.

Mark. It will but edge
Our peril if you touch him.

Phane. Then what's to do?

Mark. Nothing but wait.

Rebellion

[*The cries are heard nearer, close up to the terrace : "Narros, Narros ! Where is Narros ? Narros is our king !" And among them is a dim wailing.*

Phane. You heard that—Narros king ?

Narros. Put down your terror. Narros will not be king.

[*A Captain of the Rebels and two or three of his men come in hurriedly.*

Captain. What have you done with Narros ?
Bound ?

[*They free him.*

You yet

Shall render dues for this, you starveling throne.
Narros, the day is ours. 'Twas as you planned—
We tripped them as they turned ; their confidence
Led them as you foretold. They are overthrown
To the last arm among them.

Narros. That is life
Still strong within me. I am glad of life.

Captain. Glad but for life ?

Narros. How else ?

Captain. Still twitched in
the brain—

I thought the play of swords had medicined that.

Narros. Was I not plain ? Did I not tell you this
Should be my last of bargaining among you ?

Captain. But they would have you king.

Narros. 'Tis not my will.

Captain. What other can comb out the tangled
threads

Of this our triumph ?

Narros. Tangled or made straight,
All's one to me. Play with them as you will ;
I have brought them to your hands ; my all is
done.

Where is Shubia ?

Captain. Dead.

Phane. That's heartening speech.

Narros. Be still, you vomit out of beauty's
mouth.

Shubia dead ! How dead ? How is she dead ?

Captain. Word came that you were taken, and
she moved

Out of her safety, and took some errant blow
Of the flying battle.

Narros. Shubia—Shubia dead !

Where is she ?

Captain. Down there on the plain she lies
Among the women.

[*Narros moves to the terrace and looks down,
listening to the low sound of the wailing.*]

Narros. Go, bring her up to me.

[*The Captain and men go out.*]

Old crow hung out in the hedge, I am with you now ; Rebellion
And the vermin is upon my life as yours.

[The wailing stops.]

Phane. I say but this——

Narros. No, do not speak. Your speech
Is now but the rattle of mice among the timbers
When love and death are in the room alone.

*[The wailing is heard again as the women
bear in the body of Shubia, the Captain
with them. As they approach, Narros
speaks slowly the last lines of his song.]*

When the green woods and unquelled seas
Burn up in the disastrous sun
Our laughter shall be glad of these,
And ranging life shall know again
The rebels in whose bone and brain
Its dues were done.

Put her beside me, there, and leave us now.

[They lay her before him. There is a pause.]

Captain. This king and state—there is much
to say between us.

Narros. Not here, nor with my voice. I bid
you go.

Take them away. Do with them as you will.

Captain (moving to Phane). Come you to the
reckoning then.

*[The women go out, lamenting. The Coun-
cillors go out, Phane moving after them.
He turns and moves down to Narros.*

Phane. They are broken spoils
At the end of all.

Narros. Broken, the spoils are mine.
 [Phane goes out, the Captain following.
So still. And all the eager thirst of the limbs
Spent, spent. So much of promise betrayed.
So great a bounty of life blown off the bough
As any wizened fruit. Where are you, Shubia ?
Not here, not here. The house is empty now,
There is no profitable talk at all
In the good house now. The proud, sweet lips are
dumb.

The eagles of urgent thought are quieter now
Than a lonely heron going through the sky
When the candles come. I would have said so
much,
So much have learnt. We two had been together
Like herdsmen on the windy moors of God,
Folding our venturous flocks. The stem is snapped,
The dust is on the leaves, and love goes out
To the long roads of the world uncomraded.

[The Captain comes in.
Captain. Below are met their captains and our
own,

Phane and his councillors, and your voice is Rebellion
needed,

Without it is confusion.

Narros. I have spoken.

Captain. Will you not speak from here one
word for us—

Send one word down of counsel ?

Narros. Not a word.

Captain. How shall we treat with Phane ?

Narros. I have no word.

Captain. Where do you go, and in what hope ?

Narros. I go

Into the high sequestered woods of thought,
Where memory may nurse my fledgling hopes
Till the eagles cry again on the mountain tops.
I cannot tell you more till the time is out.

Captain. Why do you throw this fortune from
you so ?

Narros. This fortune ! Friend, will you do a
thing for me ?

Captain. If it may be done.

Narros. This queen : bury her well,

In some quiet place. Let not Phane master it—

He is too dull for such a priesthood. Set

No words upon her grave : she would not hear
them ;

And now there should be silence where she is.

Captain. It shall be done. What shall I say
below ?

Narros. Say as you will, but say I will not come.

[The Captain goes out.]

You ruined glory, I go from you now

To shape, if may be, as you'd have me shape.

To make this bitterness some pledge of you,

And make your wrathful beauty live again.

*[There are cries from below of "Narros,
Narros !"*

[He goes out, away from them.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

The Storm

TO

BARRY V. JACKSON

THE CHARACTERS ARE—

ALICE

JOAN, *her young Sister*

SARAH

AN OLD MAN

A YOUNG STRANGER

The Storm

A Mountain Cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.

Alice is looking out through the window. Joan, her young sister, and Sarah, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.

Alice. It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,
Nor lanterns, in a blackness like to that.
How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

Sarah. God is for prayers. You'll anger Him
speaking so.

Alice. I have prayed these hours, and now I'm
tired of it.

He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying out,
And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

Sarah. Past crying now, I think.

Joan. There, take no heed
Of what she says—it's a rusty mind she has,
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

Sarah. Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is
dead.

No news has been growing apace from nightfall on
Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood
At the door and said—we found him lying cold.

Alice. Whist ! you old bitter woman. Will it
never stay
In its wicked fury ? . . . and the snow's like a
black rain

Whipping the crying wind. If it would rest awhile
I could think and mind me what were best to do
To help my man. But a savagery like this
Beats at the wits till they have no tidiness.

Sarah. We'll sit and wait till they come.

Alice. And I a woman
Would never let him ask for anything,
Because of the daily thought I took for him,—
And against this spite now I've no strength at all.

Sarah. For all you would bake his bread to a
proper turn
And remember always the day for his clean shift,
There was many a scolding word for him to
bear.

Joan. Hush—

Alice. Let her talk. What does she know
at all,—

Thinking crossed words between a man and a
woman

Have anything to do with the heart ? We have,
My man and I, more than a fretful mood
Can thieve or touch. My man—I must go myself.

Joan. There is nothing you could do.

Sarah.

'Tis men The Storm

Should carry the dead man in.

Alice.

My man

Is alive, I say—surely my man's not dead—

Surely, I say—old woman, your croaking talk

Teases my brain like the pestilence out there

Till I doubt the thing I know. There's not a crag

Or cleft in the hills but is natural to him

As the stairs beyond the door there—surely,
surely—

Yet nothing is sure.

Sarah.

Death has a way with him,

A confident way.

Alice.

You know that he's not dead—

I know that too—if only that dark rage

Howling out there would leave tormenting me,

And let me reason it out in peace a little,

I could be quite, quite sure that he's not dead.

Sarah. Age is a quiet place where you can watch

The world bent with its pain and still be patient,

And warm your hands by the fire because you know

That the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are
one.

They will bring and put him down upon the floor :
Be ready for that, girl. There are times when hope
is cruel

As a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

Alice. I have a brain that is known in three
shire-towns
For a level bargain. It is strange that I should be
Listening now to a cracked old woman's clatter
When my own thoughts for him should be so clear
That I shouldn't heed the words of another body.
I want no hope—only an easy space
To remember the skill of my man among the hills
And how he would surely match their cunning
with his,
Or else to count the hours that he's been gone
And see that his chance is whittled quite away.
To have a living thought against this fear
Is all I want—but those screaming devils there
Beat in my mind like the drums in Carnarvon streets
That they use when they want to cheat folk into
thinking
That death is a handsome trade.—And so
I let a woman with none but leaky wits
Tell me the way I should be,—when most I need
To ride no borrowed sense.

Sarah. It is not wind,
For all it is louder than any flood on the hills,
Nor the crazy snow that maddens you till your brain
Is like three cats howling upon a wall,
But the darkness that comes creeping on a woman
When she knows of grief before it is spoken out,
100

And the sooner grieved is grief the sooner gone. The Storm
Be ready to make him decent for the grave.

Joan. If he should walk in now you will not forget
The trouble you are putting in the house with your
talk.

Sarah. The trouble is here.

Alice. If he should walk in now—
Yes, that's the way to think. I'll work it out,
Slowly, his doings from when he left the door
Until he comes again. You stood at the oven
With cakes half-browned against his tea. And I
Stood here beside my man and strapped his coat
Under his chin. He looked across your way—
He is fond of you, child—he calls you Father Joan
Because—but that's not it—I told him then
To-morrow would be time to bring the slates,
And let him only mend the wire to-day—
He thought so too and said—it is like a beast
Greater than half the world and crushed in a
trap,
Shrieking against the pain—what did he say?—
I have forgotten, and I had begun
To follow it all quite clearly—what did he say?
Joan. That an hour would bring him back, and
hungry too.
Alice. An hour would bring him back—but that
is nothing.

I know it now : he went to the broken wire
And mended it—three-quarters of an hour—
And then he would think that after all the slates
Were best bespoken now—six miles to go ;
He would be about a mile when this began—
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment
Day—

And that would make two hours till he reached the
quarry—

But he went on, and the neighbours up and
down

Were scared and went out searching with their
lanterns,

Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.

Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing

When all the time he has gone a twelve-mile
journey—

And then this old woman came with her neighbour
duty—

It's odd folk are,—

Sarah. It's a poor thing, spinning tales
When there's no faith in them.

Alice. Hush, I have it all
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,

Or a little longer—five hours and more all told— The Storm

It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,

Or a little more, so that's just how it works—

He should be coming now along the road,

Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

Sarah.

Ay, warm them,

A dead man's heavy bearing.

[The clock strikes nine.]

Alice.

That's the time

To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—

He must be near by now—

[A man is heard outside, kicking the snow off his boots. Alice opens the door, and an Old Man comes in, carrying an unlit lantern.]

The Old Man. My candle is spent.

[Joan takes the lantern and fits a new candle while they speak.]

Alice.

And you are going out again ?

They have not found him ?

The Old Man. No. It's not easy there.

Alice. Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

Joan. Because they haven't found him ? That's no sign.

They couldn't if he went.

Alice.

Ah yes—how is it ?—

He went, and they've been looking on the hills—

But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.
He should be back. You should have found him
for me.

Sarah. She is strange because of the trouble in
the house.

I am old, and that is something.

Alice. It is not that—

I am caught away from myself by the screaming
thing

That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that
I had reckoned all his doings since he went
Until his time for coming—but you came—
You came instead. That is not right.

The Old Man (taking the lantern and lighting it).

We'll send

Across to the quarry now—

Alice. It is no use—

He'll not have gone.

The Old Man. The night is full of tricks,
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

[*He goes out.*]

Sarah. Simon who took his money down to
market,
And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of
cattle,

Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn
And came to the house again with an empty bag.

Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring The Storm
no profit,

Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away
To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.
Think hard on that. When the old king of the
world

With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the
wheat

On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's
back,

It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.

And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

Alice. Not down to the quarry—then—my little
Joan,

Do you know at all what a man becomes to a
woman ?

How should you though ? If a man should take
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise
it,

And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his years
To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad,

If his heart was as big as a woman's, for the thing
he'd made,

The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.

That's how it is. A woman takes a mate,
And like the patient builder governs him
Into the goodman known through a countryside,
Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek
out,

And he, for all his love, may never know
How she has nourished the dear fine mastery
That bids him daily down the busy road
And leaves her by the hearth. And when he is
dead

It comes to her that the strength she has given him
To make him a gallant figure among them all
Has been the thing that has filled her, and she
lonely

Or gossiping with the folk, or about the house.

Sarah. When he is dead.

Alice. Why should I think of that ?

I am crazed, I say, because of the madness loosed
And beating against the panes. He is not dead—
You know it, woman—Joan, it would be a lie
To say my man was dead ?

Joan. There, sister, wait—

It is all we can do—there is nothing else to do.

Sarah. When he is dead. Let the thought that The Storm
comes unbidden
Be welcome, for it's the best thought. When he
is dead.

Alice. There is treachery against us—my man—
my dear—
My brave love—they are trying to part us now !
But we must be too strong when . . . when he is
dead . . .

*[There is a knock at the door. She makes
a half movement towards it.*
He would not knock. See who it is.

*[Joan opens the door and a Young Traveller,
buffeted and breathless, comes in.*
The Stranger. By Thor !
There's beauty trampling men like crumpled leaves.
May I come in till it's gone ?

Joan. Surely.
The Stranger. I set

Every sinew taut against this power,
This supple torrent of might that suddenly rose
Out of the fallen dusk and sang and leapt
Like an athlete of the gods frenzied with wine.
It seemed to rear challenging against me,
As though the master from Valhalla's tables,
Grown heady in his revels, had cried out—
Behold me now crashing across the earth

To shake the colonies of antic men
Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows !
And I measured myself against this bragging pride,
Climbing step by step through the blinding riot
Of frozen flakes swung on the cataract wind,
My veins praising the tyranny that was matched
Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

Alice. The storm is drenched with treachery and
sin—

It is not good to praise it.

The Stranger. You on the hills
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,
And a storm to you is but a hindered task
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.
But I was strange among this gaiety
Plying black looms in a black firmament,
This joy that was split out of the iron heavens
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,
A cold monotony suddenly thrust
Into a waking world of lusty change,
A wizened death elected from the waste
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face ;
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,

And once was on the crest of the world's tide,
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,
That god striking a star for holiday,
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter
To see me slink away.

The Storm

Alice. It is no god,
But a brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing
That blame can't reach.

The Stranger. Not all have eyes to see.—
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh
quarrel
With larger thews than man's.

Alice. Stranger, I'd give
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.
You are welcome—but leave your praising off this
blight.

You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know
this night

Is eating through my bones into the marrow,
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,
And making my heart the oldest thing of any ?
Do you see those lights ?

The Stranger. They seemed odd moving there,
In a storm like this.

Alice. A man is lost on the hills.

The Stranger. That's bad. But who ?

Alice. My man is lost on the hills.

Sarah. She has it now ; her man is dead on the hills.

The Stranger. I talked amiss, not knowing of trouble here.

But why should he be dead ?

Alice. The woman is worn,
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.
You ask at once as any wise man would.
I have told her and told and told that he's not dead,
And my young sister, too, though but a girl,
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,
But never dead. That is the way you think ?
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away ;
And then, although you know, you let in fear
Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting
to-night

In the midst of an idiot wrath drumming and
drumming

Like a plague of bees in swarm above your eyes.

I do not know—I have not any strength

To fathom it now, and there is none to tell me.

Sarah. She knows it all, though the thing is
hard to say.

Alice. Have done! Young stranger, you have The Storm
travelled the world,

I think, or have grown learned in great cities,
And can tell the way things go—is it not wrong
To say that a man because of an ugly night
Should perish on his home-ground? He would
find a road

Out of a danger such as that, because—
That is the way things happen—tell me now?

The Stranger. It is likely that he would.

Alice. You hear that, Joan—
A traveller who has been in foreign dangers
And comes a scholar from a hundred cities
Says it is well, and that we must be patient.

The Stranger. No, I've not travelled, and I only
say a man
Knowing the hills would likely weather a storm.

Alice. There, there—you must not take it back
again,
Because you know, and you have said it is well.

Sarah. They cut a stone that is like a small church
window,
And they carve a name and a line out of the book,
And when that's done there is nothing then to doubt.

[*The storm has suddenly cleared. The silence
falls upon them strangely, and there is a
pause.*]

Alice. It is spent at last. He will come from his shelter now.

My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.

[Joan does so. There is another pause.]

I have my thought again. It is an end.

I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

The Stranger. The lights are coming.

Sarah.

The anger never bates,
But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,
And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,
And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

[The blackness beyond the window has given place to clear starlight on the hills. A number of men with lanterns pass by. There is a knock: Alice opens the door, and the Old Man stands there with his lighted lantern. She looks at him, and neither speaks. She turns away to the table.]

Alice. Why have we waited . . . all this time
. . . to know . . .

[Her sorrow breaks over her.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

The God of Quiet



TO
MY FATHER

THE CHARACTERS ARE—

A YOUNG BEGGAR

AN OLD BEGGAR

A CITIZEN

A SOLDIER

FIRST KING

A HERALD

SECOND KING

THE GOD

The God of Quiet

A Road at the Summit of a Hill outside a Be-leaguered City. It is the evening of a hot summer day.

On the far side of the road is a bank, from the top of which the city could be seen. On a great stone cube, halfway up the bank, is the life-sized figure of a god. Not unlike the Buddha in presence, it is the God of Quiet.

Two Beggars, a young man and an old, come in, moving towards the city. They stop.

Young Beggar. Nor coin nor crust.
Three leagues of dust
We've trodden. Blast
Them—let them fast
And try the flavour—

Old Beggar. Hold, man, hold—
'Twas like enough that our tale were told
For ever before the sun went down,
With the devils of war let loose to frown
On a poor man's cry for alms. We live,
And that is something—

Young Beggar. The Lord forgive
Your weakling heart—

Old Beggar.

Nay, ask him, you,

To pardon the stubborn thing you do
In cursing when—

Young Beggar. Stop your babbling tongue,
Your belly's old but mine is young—

Old Beggar. Nay, nay, my son ; not angry now—
Not angry—there. I've seen the plough
Break stouter stones—the times will mend.

Young Beggar. Old man, I spoke in haste—

Old Beggar. Come, lend
Your arm—there—so ; now, let us sit
And rest us here.

*[The Old Man sits down on the bank ; the
Young Man goes to the top and looks out.
While he speaks the Old Man watches
the god.]*

Young Beggar. The slings have hit
That city hard. Well, let them fight
And finish. Broken walls are gates
Not warded well, and men in flight
Pay toll to beggars.

Old Beggar. God creates
Good holy times of peace for us—

Young Beggar. Peace—holy times—old chatter-
pie—

Old Beggar. Rich seasons after ruinous—

Young Beggar. Dream-daft old man, put fancies
by.

The God of Quiet

[He has risen, bows to the god, and sits below
the figure, untroubled.

[He turns to the other.

How

By some juggling fellow with fancy brains ?

[*He stares at the god.*]

All right, old image, I'm not afraid . . .

I'm not for your flock . . . the belly's pains

Are masters may not be served by sleep . . .

Old drowsy god . . . I must fight, and plan,

And lie, and be cunning, and peer, and creep—

For starving's a dirty death for a man.

Old Beggar. There's many a man with a buzzing
hive

Of thoughts in his brain that are nothing at
all.

Young Beggar. Damn you, be still! . . . You
dead-alive.

Old grinning god, I'm what you'd call

A fellow with gift of argument,

And I tell you he should be hurrying now,

Ransacking the world, not a mere consent,

A space unpeopled, a rusty plough . . .

Life is a matter of shouting and haste,

You quiet, old seducing thing . . .

Why won't you shout ? . . . You muddy-faced

Old silence . . . silence . . . beggar-man, king . . .

Victuals and void . . . sharp stones and boots . . .

A coat and nakedness . . . rain and sun . . .

A thistle that's blown and a thistle with roots . . .

All right, old god . . . all's one, all's one.

[*He sits beside his fellow, composed. An* The God
exhausted Soldier, who has been out from of Quiet
the city, reconnoitring, comes in, watching
the distances.

Soldier. Have you seen a king in golden gear
And a great host moving to bring us aid ?

[*A pause.*

Are you drunk, or daft, or won't you hear ?

[*He moves up the bank, and looks down to the*
city ; then, fixedly, at the god ; a pause.

Old god of quiet, you've lost your trade.

[*An Old Man from the city comes in*
hurriedly. The Soldier comes down.

Soldier. News—what news from the city walls ?

Citizen. An arm-thrust more and the city falls.

Is there sound or sign of the swords of the king ?

Soldier. No sound, nor sign.

Citizen.

That life should bring

Her comely days to so bad a close ;

Have you sought them far ?

Soldier.

There are watchful foes

About us—I dare not set my feet

Beyond this place.

Citizen.

And life was sweet,

A good adventure—and now an end

Of pleasant ways between friend and friend.

[*He moves up the bank.*

O city whose red roofs look to the sea,
Never again your stones shall be
Glad of your children who smite the waves
With oars well swung, [Coming down
and bonded slaves
Shall live to grudge their dead of death.

Soldier. I have fought, and hoped, and spoken
well

In the midst of fears, and I'll spend no breath
Nor courage more to dispute with hell.
We're a broken city, and ill's the day ;
My dear was hungry, my dear is dead—
And old god Quiet may whistle away
Till the furies are quiet that throng my head.
[He sits below the god.

Citizen. Nay, let your sword be busy down below.

Soldier. My limbs are all bemused. I cannot go.

Citizen. One sword may strike the balance in
this doubt.

Soldier. The scales are turned ; the city's term is
out.

Citizen. And will you choose in this extremity
To creep aside from fate ?

Soldier. I only see,
Beyond disaster that I understand
Darkly as men the process of a hand
Obscure in heaven and hell, a little space

For rest, and the remembrance of a face,
And falling sleep, then covering death, obscure
Even as life, unfathomable, sure
As fugitive thoughts that pass and turn again ;
Aye, death is dark as is the madness of men,
But life distract is savage in the throat,
A blind uncaptured vigour, and remote
From reason's airy palaces, a way
Teased by a million purposes, till day
Rattles on day in black bewilderment . . .
But death, I think, is quiet, and a spent
Sorrow at least, when every friend is kind,
And fretting worms no more can plague the
mind.

Citizen. You yet are young for death.

Soldier. What cause have I

To covet dribbling age who am now put by
Bereaved and broken in my middle years
From life's assembly ?

Citizen. Thus is it one hears
From men who are light with weariness.

Soldier. It is so—

I am tired, tired, tired ; old god, you know . . .
And much disputing is but foolishness—
A ploughing of sown fields.

Citizen. And in distress
You are afraid.

The God
of Quiet

Soldier. Who tries another's heart
Speaks as a god, and cannot bear his part.

Citizen. Down there for winning is a hero's name.

Soldier. I have endured, and hold it now no shame
To pass forgotten. There is no weight at all
Now in this arm, and where the heroes fall
Should I too join a sorry sword, 'twould be
But boasting in my pale infirmity
Of such immortal courage as shall lose
No virtue being secret. My blood and thews
I have not spared ; my mind is easy so ;
And, though my friend is death, I will not go
Courting a vain death for my renown.
For every hero compassing his crown,
Darkly in indistinguishable sleep
A hundred lie, and the quick world shall keep
No word of how their hearts were bright, how spent
At last. I am of these, and am content.

Citizen. Aye—it is just a weariness of brain.

Soldier. O lord of quiet, I am yours again,
After confusion, after vanity.

[*He turns away to the god.*

Citizen (*looking down to the city*). All now is
done . . . How long shall succour be . . .
He will come too late, this king who was our friend.

[*There is a pause ; then in the distance
victorious cries from the besiegers.*

Voices. It is ours. The wall is breaking. The God

Stricken : send of Quiet

One thunder more. It falls . . . It falls . . . It falls !

Citizen. The time is come. And bloody burials
Shall take their lamentable toll of days,
And men shall know the sorrow that betrays
Beauty and resolution and the high
Conduct of heart proposing patiently
Desirable shapes wrought out of shapeless dust,
Not scattering of created things. And lust
Of vengeance shall make black the people's mind,
So heavy is their trial, and so blind
Has queer omnipotence set us from his hand.
So death shall have his season in the land,
Distracted death, till life shall come again
As water to the maddened tongues of men
Burnt on the sand of sterile leagues of waste ;
And all the words, the tumult, and the haste
That prosper now to feed some curious pride
Shall pass. O quiet god, be satisfied :
The battles fail : your healing eyes endure ;
Kingdoms are ghosts : your kingdom is secure.

*The King, a great captain, moving to the
city's relief, enters*

King. What on the walls ?

Citizen. An end is made.

King (as to his lieutenants). Stay you. (*Looking down to the city*) Aye, twenty thousand spear,
Which is my measure, might be laid
Threefold in vain against their gear.
(*To his men*) Let all be still. What men are these ?

Citizen. Though strange, devout ; they worship.

King. Whom ?

Citizen. The god of Quiet.

King (he looks at the god ; a pause). A god who sees.

World-weary city at your doom,
Strong king in your victorious hour,
You have endured, and slain, and died,
Poor clay that would excel in power,
Made frantic by some silly pride.
Could you not learn that while we grow
As men, maybe from less to more
While æons over æons flow,
Yet holiest man may move before
His fellows but a single pace,
One flight of thought, and from his tongue
Hardly shall fall a word of grace
More than from any clod among
Sad naturals or runagates ?
No. You must still with narrow eyes
Consider how to top your mates

And write your name across the skies ;
Nor great for honour your desire,
Nor vision, nor creating song,
But merely for consuming fire,
Sorry possessions, and a strong
Sword that shall rule you know not how,
Judgment, you know not whom to bind . . .
The fruit was full upon the bough,
O spendthrift wind, O spendthrift wind,
Mad hearts, mad world, mad blood of men,
Mad counsels and mad reckoning . . .
You quiet god, I leave again
Their tumult, and to you I bring
Humility, and thought that burns
To shape itself and fetter none . . .
We wake, a generation turns,
We learn to love, and we have done . . .
And shall we spend these little days
Disputing till our veins are cold ?

The God
of Quiet

[He sits before the god.]

Citizen. The victor comes.

King.

Or comes or stays

It is no matter.

Citizen. I am old—

A spent arm, a mere messenger

Whose errands now are done. At last

I too may rest.

[He sits by the others.]

King. I wasted where
Shrill madness was ; those moods are cast.

[*A moment's pause.*]

Old Beggar. It is the quiet mind that keeps
The tumults of the world in poise.

Soldier. It is the angry soul that sleeps
Where the world's folly is and noise ;

King. For anger blunts us and destroys.

Citizen. We are little men to be so proud.

Young Beggar. We are fools : what was so long
to build

We break.

King. Our praise is for the loud
Tongue and the glib.

Old Beggar. The gentle-willed
We starve, and the prophet's lips are stilled.

King. It is the quiet mind that wakes.

Citizen. The angry soul ever is blind.

Young Beggar. Love is the bowl that folly
breaks.

Soldier. Who rules the world the world shall
find.

Old Beggar. All wisdom is the quiet mind.

[*A pause again. A Herald comes in.*]

Herald. Are you the king who with his arms was
sworn

In succour to this city now forlorn ?

King. I am that king.

Herald.

And will you yet oppose The God
of Quiet

My lord of so sure aim ?

King.

Which of us knows

What is our aim, much less if it be true ?

Herald. Will you set for battle ?

King.

What have I to do

With battles now ? I have thought a strange new
thing

This day.

Herald. Though some few score may call you
king,

My master is a king would make your crown

A twisted slip of brass. Had you gone down

In battle to the city walls, your end

Had been to swell his triumph ; nor shall
mend

Your case if now you bring your ranks to dare

The fury of his captaincy.

King.

I care

For nothing bitter now that men may say.

Quarrels are done.

Herald.

My king shall choose a way

Chastising this infirmity of will,

Surely as had his hand been strong to fill

Your armies with disaster had you stood

With your king's name in a king's hardihood.

King. You god of Quiet, some day shall men have
spent
All the wild humorous blood of argument ?

[*The Victorious King comes in.*]

Second King. What of the lord who thought to
stride across
My way ?

Herald. His valour will bring little loss
To your victorious arms. He has put by
The sceptre and the warrior sword, to lie
With beggars mumbling at some idol's feet—
That is the man—

Second King (to First King). Fellow, I came to
meet
A king in arms—one worthy of my might,
One strong to bear the intolerable sight
Of all my spears a moment ere he fell,
And should no other story be to tell
Save that he too was broken at my heel.
Now, though you slink aside, you yet shall feel
My majesty, the anger of my name . . .
Captive and stripped, you shall be a jest, a shame,
A laughter to my kingdoms and your own,
You faint and thin deserter of a throne,
You spiritless who feared the naked blades . . .
Why did you fear, and cheat me ?

First King.

Falsehood fades,

His fortunate treasure in dispute and vain
Adding of barren gain to barren gain.
And honour that is your hope is but a word
Distract and void to hearts that have never heard
Kindness and contemplation call.

Second King (to the god). What bane
Of madness have you planted in his brain—
How have you slacked the heat that should have
 passed
Defeated to my glory, and how cast
That valour down that should have been my spoils . . .
Not even a god shall lightly set his toils
Against my triumphs . . .

First King. Why do you rail . . .
Is it always so in your restless mind,
That ever your words must rattle as hail
On gods and men ? Can you never find
That centre of thought where life is thrilled
As a world of wings plying the air,
A million pulses that beat, and build,
Of the flowing arcs that are weaving there,
A perfect balance—a motion due
As ever the tides of the sea have known,
True as the flight of a god is true,
Yet sweet and still as the carven stone . . .

Second King. Will you fight ?

First King. Your word brings back to me

Swords, and blood . . . and forgotten things,
As sometimes, out of a scent maybe
Of moss on a wall in April, springs
To a moment of life, that is born and sped
In a curious flavour of the mind,
Some buried hour from the years long dead—
So much is your word, but this.

The God
of Quiet

Second King. They find
Who speak me so that they speak not well.

First King. O quiet god, I will speak no more.

Second King (to the god). O quiet god! And the
day shall tell

Of a god no less than a man who bore
His will against mine and repented it—
You have thought to subdue with your quiet eyes
The prey of my sword, you have thought to sit
And govern by peace, while I must rise
And stride through the world and sweat and bleed
To gather my gains, and the man shall take,
Who should measure his might against mine, a creed
That tricks my glory, my will for the sake
Of a sleepy vision! A god may rule
As he will in some heaven with gods to hear;
But a god who comes between men is a fool,
And a fool is little enough to fear.

*[He drives his dagger to the god's heart. The
God rises, and speaks swaying.]*

The God (crying out). Not one of you in all the world to know me.

[The God falls headlong. All rise. There is silence for a moment.]

First King (fiercely). Why did you do it ?

Second King. He was a bad god—
A sly god and slothful—an evil liver—

First King. Why did you do it ? He was a friendly god,
Smiling upon our faults, a great forgiver . . .
He gave us quietness—

Second King. I say that he's well dead—

First King. And I curse you for the killing,
[He draws his sword]
and here I swear

To requite the honour of this god ill bestead
By a braggart king.

Second King (drawing his sword). So ho ! at last
you dare
To stand again as a man—my coney, come—
You shall die well, being slain by me.

Young Beggar (to Old Beggar). Can he do
As he said and avenge the god ? *[They talk together.]*

Second King (to Herald). Trumpet and drum
Bid all to arms !

[The Herald gives the signal, and they sound to arms.]

First King (to Soldier). And bid my armies, you— The God
of Quiet
[*The Soldier does so. The Old Beggar raises*

*the head of the fallen God in his arm,
the Kings facing each other with drawn
swords—trumpets and drums sounding
from both armies. All go off—the Kings
fighting, and for a moment nothing is
heard save the clashing of their swords.*

Old Beggar (looking into the face of the fallen god).
Not one of us in all the world to know you.

[*Cries and the noise of arms break out again
as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

$X=\mathbb{O}$

A Night of the Trojan War

TO

GILBERT CANNAN

THE CHARACTERS ARE—

PRONAX } *Greeks*
SALVIUS }

ILUS } *Trojans*
CAPYS }

A GREEK SENTINEL

A GREEK SERVANT

The action passes between a Greek tent and the Trojan walls, and is continuous.

X=O

A Night of the Trojan War

SCENE I

A Grecian Tent on the Plain before Troy, towards the end of the ten years' war. It is a starry summer night. Pronax and Salvius, two young Greek soldiers, are in the tent, Salvius reading by a lighted torch, Pronax watching the night. During the scene a Sentinel passes at intervals to and fro behind the tent.

Pronax. So is the night often at home. I have
seen

White orchards brighten under a summer moon,
As now these tents under the stars. This hour
My father's coppices are full of song,
While sleep is on the comfortable house—
Unless one dear one wakes to think of me
And count my chances when the Trojan death
Goes on its nightly errand.

[The Sentinel passes.

It's a dear home,
And fragrant, and there's blessed fruit and corn,
And thoughts that make me older than my youth

Come even from the nettles at the gate.
To-day, perhaps, the harvesters are out,
And on the night is the ripe pollen blown . . .
And this is the third harvest that has gone
While we have wasted on a barren plain
To avenge some wrong done in our babyhood
On beauty that we have not seen. Three years . . .
But so it is, and so it must be done,
Till the Greek oath is proven. Salvius,
Why is all lovely thought a pain ?

Salvius.

We know

Even upon the flood of adoration,
That beauty passes. That's the tragic tale
That is our world.

Pronax.

Is it not very strange
That, prisoned in this quarrel so long and long,
Until to remember a little Argive street
Is torture to the bone, yet there is now
Nothing of hatred in the blood for them
Whose death is all our daily use, but merely
Consent in death, knowing that death may strike
Across our tongues as lightly as those that lie
For ever dumb because we might not spare.

Salvius. Not strange ; who goes in company with
death,

Watching his daily desolation, thinking,
On every stroke, of all the agony

That from that stroke goes throbbing, throbbing, $X=0$
throbbing, A Night of
Forgets all hate. How should we hate the dead ? the Trojan
And, where death ranges as among us now, War

You, Pronax, I, and our antagonists
And friends alike are all but as dead men

[*The Sentinel passes.*]

Moving together in a ghostly world,
With life a luckless beggar at the door.
It is not ours to hate, who have all put by
That safety where men think eternity
Immeasurably far, and leisured passions have
Their sorry breeding place. Great kings may hate,
And priests may thunder hate, and grey-beard
prophets

May cry again to those who cry their hate
In pride of their new-found authority,
Fearing lest love should mark them as they are,
And send them barren from their brutal thrift.
But not for us this envy. It is ours
Merely to die, or give the death that these
Out of their hatred or indifference will.

Pronax. It's not that a man grows tardy in his
duty . . .

It's still a glad thing to do as the motherland bids,
Though the blind soul forgets how sprang the
cause.

I shall die in my hour, though it should come
to-day,
Not grudging. Yet it is bitterness for youth,
When nothing should be but scrutiny of life,
Mating, and building towards a durable fame,
And setting the hearthstone trim for a lover's
cares,

To let all knowledge of these things go, and learn
Only of death, that should be hidden from youth,
A great thing biding upon the fulness of age,
And not made common gossip among these tides
Of daily beastliness. And still I must remember,
For all I have renounced my thronging life,
My orchards, and my rivers, and the bells
Of twilight cattle moving in the mist.

Salvius. I know; the mind grows faint with
thinking of them—

Those little, lovely things of home. My bed
Looks to the west on the Ionian sea—
A sweet, fresh-smelling room it is. I wrote
My rightest poems there. I cannot see
A sail now coming Troyward but my brain
Is sick for that small room, above the quay
Where sailors laugh at dawn and all day long,
Until the silent sunset ships go out
Into Sicilian waters.

Pronax.

There your poems

Were made, in Pylos ; and in Athens I
Too dreamed, although I caught no lyric song—
I envy you your song ;—I was to build
A cleaner state ; I dreamed a policy
Purer than states have known ; I was to bring
Princedom to every hearth, to every man
Knowledge that he was master of his fate.
The dream is dulled. Three years of Trojan
dust

X = o
A Night of
the Trojan
War

Have taught me but to pray at night for sleep,
And an arm stronger in cunning than my foe's,
A quicker eye to parry death. And, Salvius,
What of your songs ?

Salvius. Asleep these many days,
Biding their happy time if that should be.

Pronax. And death is watching,

[*The Sentinel passes*

and your song, that grew

In the womb of generations for the use
And joy of men, may perish ere it takes
Its larger music, that the tale may go
That Greece drove bloodier war than Ilium ;
That's a poor bargain. . . . But these thoughts
that stir

Like ghosts out of a life that should have been,
Neglect my duty. It is past the hour
I should be nosing along the Trojan wall

To catch what prey may be. I have scarred the
wall

At the bend there where I told you, in the breaking
stone,

These many nights, until at last I've made
A foothold to the top. It's a queer game,
This tripping of life suddenly in the dark,
This blasting of flesh that is wholesome yet in the
blood,

And those who weep, I think, are as those would
weep

If I should fall. I loathe it ; but, good-night ;
You should sleep ; it is late, and it is your guard
at dawn.

*[He is arming himself, and wrapping himself
in his cloak.]*

Good-night. What are you reading ?

Salvius.

Songs that one

Made in my province. The sails are in his song,
And seabirds, and our level pasture-lands,
And the bronzed fishers on the flowing tides.
His name was Creon. I will make such songs
If the years will.

*Pronax (who has poured himself out and drunk a
cup of wine).* I know. Put out the torch

If you're abed before I come. Good-night.

Salvius. Good-night : good luck.

Pronax. And will you bid them fill X=0
 The trough ; this business may make bloody hands. A Night of
[He looks out into the night, and goes. the Trojan
[The Sentinel passes. War
Salvius (reading). Upon the dark Sicilian waves,
 The casting fishers go . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

On Troy Wall. Capys, a young Trojan soldier, is on guard, looking out over the plain where the Greeks are encamped. Ilus, another young soldier, his friend, wearing a bearskin, comes to him.

Ilus. When does your watch end ?

Capys. In two hours ; at midnight.

Ilus. They're beautiful, those tents, under the stars.

It is my night to go like a shadow among them,
 And, snatching a Greek life, come like a shadow again.

It's an odd skill to have won in the rose of your youth—

Two years, and once in seven days—a hundred,

More than a hundred, and only once a fault.
A hundred Greek boys, Capys, like myself—
Loving, and quick in honour, and clean of fear—
Spoiled in their beauty by me whose desire is
 beauty
Since first I walked the April hedgerows. Would
 time

But work upon this Helen's face, maybe
This nine-year quarrel would be done, and Troy
Grow sane, and her confounding councillors
Be given carts to clean and drive to market.
What of your sea-girl? Has she grown?

Capys.

You ask

Always the question, friend. The chisels rust,
The moths are in my linen coats, my mallets
Are broken. Ilus, in my brain were limbs
Supple and mighty; the beauty of women moved
To miraculous birth in my imagining;
I had conceived the body of man, to make
Divine articulation of the joy
That flows uncounted in every happy step
Of health; the folk faring about Troy streets
Should have flowered upon my marble marvellously:
I would have given my land a revelation
Sweet as the making of it had been to me.
And still it shall be, if ever from my mind
Falls this obscure monotony, that makes

The world an echo, its vivid gesture gone.
Troy peaceful shall be Troy magnificent,
For I will make her so.

X = o
A Night of
the Trojan
War

Ilus. It would be grand
If Troy would use us as we might be used,
To build and sing and make her market-places
Honest, and show her people that all evil
Is the lethargic mind. I have seen this Troy
Bloom in my thought into a simple state
Where jealousy was dead because no man spoke
Out of his vanity of the thing he knew not.
Capys, it is so little that is needed
For righteousness ; we are all so truly made,
If only to our making we were true.
Why should we fight these Greeks ? There was
some anger
Some generous heat of the blood those years ago
When Paris brought his Helen into Troy
With Menelaus screaming at his heels ;
But that's forgotten now, and none can stay
This thing that none would have endure. I have
thought
Often, upon those nights when I have gone
Fatally through the Grecian tents, how well
Might he whose life I stole and I have thriven
Together conspiring this or that of good
For all men, and I have sickened, and gone on

To strike again as Troy has bidden me,
For an oath is a queer weevil in the brain.

Capys. Who's there ?

A Voice. Troy and the Trojan death.

Capys. Pass Troy.

It is still upon the plains to-night, and the stars
Are a lantern light against you—you must go
Warily, *Ilus*. The loss of many friends
Has sharpened my love, not dulled me against loss.
I am careful for you to-night in all this beauty
Of glowing summer—disaster might choose this night
So brutally, and so disaster likes.
Go warily.

Ilus. I know the tented squares
And every lane among the Greeks, as I know
The walls of Troy ; and I can pass at night
Within an handshot of a watching eye,
And be but a shadow of cloud or a windy bush.
A hundred times, remember.

Capys. Yet would I could come
To take your danger or share it.

Ilus. No ; there's a use
That's more than courage in this. And, *Capys*, yet
Those chisels must win your vision into form
For the world's light and ease. It's an ill day
Among ill days that smites the seer's lips.
Your work's to do.

Capys. And yours—that dream of Troy
Regenerate, with the heart of the people shown
In the people's life, not lamentably hurt
By men who, mazed with authority, put by
Authority's proper use, and so are evil,
While still the folk under their tyranny keep
Their kindness, waiting upon deliverance.
So may we come together to our work,
In prophecy you of life, creation I.
How long to-night ?

X = o
A Night of
the Trojan
War

Ilus. Before your watch is done
I shall be back. Here at this point, before
The night is full ; throw me the rope upon
The signal, thus—

*[He whistles. He is climbing over the parapet,
to which he has hooked a rope.]*

Peace with you till I come.

Capys. And luck with you. Go warily. Farewell.

*[Ilus drops down to the plain below. Capys
draws the rope up. There is silence for
a moment.]*

Capys (moving to and fro along the wall).

Or Greek or Trojan, all is one
When snow falls on our summer-time,
And when the happy noonday rhyme
Because of death is left undone.

The bud that breaks must surely pass,
Yet is the bud more sure of May
Than youth of age, when every day
Death is youth's shadow in the glass.

[A hand is seen groping on the parapet. Pronax, looking cautiously along the wall, draws himself up silently, unseen by Capys, who continues:]

Beside us ever moves a hand,
Unseen, of deadly stroke, and when
It falls on youth—

[He hears the movement behind him, and turns swiftly.]

Who's there ?

Pronax (rushing upon him). A Greek unlucky to
Trojan arms—

A sworn Greek, terrible in obedience.

[His onslaught has overwhelmed Capys, who falls without a cry, the Greek's dagger in his breast. Pronax draws it out, looks at his dead antagonist, shudders, peers out over the wall, and very carefully climbs down at the point where he came.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE III

X = o
A Night of
the Trojan
War

The Greek Tent again. Salvius is still reading, and the torch burning. A Servant brings a large jar of water which he pours into the trough outside the tent. He goes with the jar, and a moment later the Sentinel passes behind the tent. There is silence for a few moments, Salvius turning the pages of his book. Then, from the shadow in front of the tent, Ilus in his bearskin is seen stealthily approaching. He reaches the tent opening without a sound, and in the same unbroken silence his dagger is in the Greek's heart. Ilus catches the dead man as he falls, and lets his body sink on to one of the couches inside the tent. The Sentinel passes. Ilus, breathless, waits till the steps have gone, and then, stealthily as he came, disappears.

There is a pause. Pronax comes out of the darkness, and, throwing his cloak on the ground, goes straight to the trough, and begins to wash his hands.

Pronax. What, still awake, and reading? Those
are rare songs,
To keep a soldier out of his bed at night.
Ugh—Salvius, sometimes it's horrible—
He had no time for a word—he walked those walls

Under the stars as a lover might walk a garden
Among the moonlit roses—this cleansing's good—
He was saying some verses, I think, till death broke
in.

Cold water's good after this pitiful doing,
And freshens the mind for comfortable sleep.
Well, there, it's done, and sleep's a mighty curer
For all vexations.

[*The Sentinel passes.*

It's time that torch was out—
I do not need it, and you should be abed . . .
Salvius . . .

[*He looks into the tent for the first time.*

What, sleeping, and still dressed ?
That's careless, friend, and the torch alight still . . .
Salvius . . .

Salvius, I say . . . gods ! . . . what, friend . . .
Salvius, Salvius . . .

Dead . . . it is done . . . it is done . . . there
is judgment made . . .

Beauty is broken . . . and there on the Trojan
wall

One too shall come . . . one too shall come . . .
[*The Sentinel passes.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE IV

X = o

A Night of
the Trojan
War

The Trojan Wall. The body of Capys lies in the starlight and silence. After a few moments the signal comes from Ilus below. There is a pause. The signal is repeated. There is a pause.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Mary Stuart

TO

NORA AND ST JOHN ERVINE

THE CHARACTERS ARE—

ANDREW BOYD

JOHN HUNTER

MARY STUART

MARY BEATON

DAVID RICCIO

DARNLEY

THOMAS RANDOLPH

BOTHWELL

Mary Stuart

ACT I

A small library in Andrew Boyd's house in Edinburgh. In the far wall is a fireplace, and to the right of it a high folding window. Above the fireplace is a large oil portrait of Mary Stuart.

It is late on a summer evening, and the window is open, giving on to a garden terrace, under which the town lies in the moonlight.

Andrew Boyd, who is seventy years old, sits at a small table with a slight, querulous, but not charmless, young man, John Hunter. Boyd, wearing a black velvet coat and skull-cap, looks as Charles the First might have done had he achieved a fuller age. Hunter is in evening clothes. The date is 1900 or later.

Hunter. That's all. It's terrible.

Boyd. What do you propose to do ?

Hunter. I don't know. What can I do ?

Boyd. Did you merely want to tell me—or do you want my advice ?

Hunter. Andrew, the few grains of wisdom I have I've picked up from you. At least, I think so. Help me—if there is any help.

Boyd. I don't know that I can guide your moods. That's difficult always between men. I can only try to tell you what I think. Is it worth while ?

Hunter. Well ?

Boyd. You and Margaret have been married five years, isn't it ? It's not long, but it's a good deal in young lives.

Hunter. Five years—yes.

Boyd. They have been happy years, haven't they ?

Hunter. Perfectly, until this.

Boyd. They seemed so, to you. And now—by the way, have you ever cared for any other woman ?

Hunter. No.

Boyd. No. And now there's Finlay. I've always liked Finlay. And his book on our Queen is the wisest word about her that I know.

Hunter. My God ! It's funny, isn't it ? Finlay on harlotry. I beg your pardon, Andrew.

Boyd. That's just it, my boy. Harlotry. The word buzzes in your brain, doesn't it ? I wonder. Do you want to understand at all—or do you just mean to be angry ?

Hunter. It's easy enough to understand.

Boyd. No ; never easy. It needs patience, and love.

Hunter. I understand, bitterly, because I love.

Boyd. It needs patience, and love. And there Mary Stuar must be no confusion of pride.

Hunter. What do you mean ?

Boyd. There are women whose talent it is to serve. And some are great lovers.

Hunter. I kept no love from her.

Boyd. Was it enough ?

Hunter. What does that mean ? I tell you she loves Finlay.

Boyd. How do you know ?

Hunter. She told me.

Boyd. It was not a secret that you surprised ?

Hunter. No.

Boyd. Have you liked Finlay ?

Hunter. I suppose so. Yes—it's the uglier for that.

Boyd. She told you at once ?

Hunter. I think so. Yes, I'm sure of that.

Boyd. Do you want her love ?

Hunter. That's absurd, Andrew.

Boyd. What is the most precious thing in the world to you ? In your emotions ?

Hunter. That is. You know.

Boyd. Or your sense of mastery in owning her ?

Hunter. You can't refine things like that.

Boyd. But you must, or fall into the mere foolishness of life. You must answer yourself. Do you

want to enjoy her love, or do you want to enslave it ?

Hunter. How can I believe that what she gives to Finlay isn't taken from me ?

Boyd. She can take nothing from you that is yours.

Hunter. Her love belongs to me.

Boyd. If you can keep it.

Hunter. You are an old man, Andrew, and my best friend.

Boyd. Yes, you are angry. You are afraid. You fear for your pride. And there is but one salvation. Perfect love casteth out fear.

Hunter. How could she—how could she ? I was so happy always—that at least seemed safe.

Boyd. I was never married, but I have understood women. Or I think so. That's an old man's compliment to himself. Men use them ill.

Hunter. But they can destroy us. Look at this.

Boyd. Yes, I know. They can be wild in the wits, too. But not as you mean. And they have the better excuse, perhaps. I want you to see this, John. It is you that are in peril of sin here, not she.

Hunter. But I have done nothing but love her.

Boyd. You have accused her.

Hunter. She accused herself.

Boyd. Accused ?

Hunter. Call it what you will.

Boyd. Let us call it the right thing.

Hunter. Well ?

Boyd. She did not accuse herself, I think. She trusted you, splendidly.

Hunter. That's oddly put, isn't it ? The trusting, surely, was mine.

Boyd. I think not, not at least as you see it. What was it you trusted ?

Hunter. Margaret's devotion.

Boyd. Her love of you, you mean ?

Hunter. Yes, that.

Boyd. Has she betrayed your trust ?

Hunter. What's the use of saying it over and over again ?

Boyd. There's folly in it, my boy, and I want you to see it. I want you to see exactly where the betrayal is, so that whatever you do shall not be done blindly. You trusted Margaret's love. It is a wide thing, radiant, the capacity in her for loving ?

Hunter. I was envied—everywhere.

Boyd. Very well. She gave her love to you, freely. I've seen it, and I know its richness. Suppose it had been a poor mean thing, with no roots, subject to little dark intrigues, lightly given and lightly

taken away. Then this new interest, or any, would have been—what shall we say—a peccadillo—something to hide, wouldn't it ?

Hunter. I don't know. Perhaps. I suppose so.

Boyd. But Margaret is not made for these slight occasions, is she ? You know that, or the better man in you knows it. It is the insignificant heart that is furtive, not worth loving. But Margaret hid nothing.

Hunter. I don't understand that part of it. That she told me doesn't help the pity of it—but why did she tell me ?

Boyd. I said. Because she loves you, and because she trusted you splendidly.

Hunter. Trusted me in what ?

Boyd. To understand. That was beautiful homage to your love. But you cannot understand. She may be learning that now. Perhaps in her heart she knew it before. I wonder.

Hunter. What do you want me to believe ?

Boyd (*rising and moving to the portrait of Mary Stuart*). She, too, was a great lover. I am an old man, and I have enjoyed many things. Life has been full, life here about me, and the life of history and the poets. And one has been as real as another.

[*He moves to the open window and looks out.*

There in Edinburgh was lived the saddest of all

histories, the tragedy of all such women who are Mary Stuart
unlucky in their men—Margaret's tragedy, perhaps.

Hunter. But your Queen——

Boyd. No, don't be impatient. Mary Stuart is in my blood, I know, but I am thinking of your trouble only, John. Have you ever reflected on the strangeness of that Edinburgh story—the confusion of it, growing and growing through the years? History never so entangled itself. All the witnesses lied, and nearly all who have considered it have been absorbed in confirming this word, refuting that. And at the centre of it, obscured by our argument, is the one glowing reality, a passionate woman. Beside that, the rest is nothing, but we forget.

Hunter. What has this to do with Margaret?

Boyd. It is Margaret. These women—such women—are sometimes destroyed finding no man who can know all that they have to give. Is Margaret to be destroyed? Ask yourself. Such as these do not love unworthily—it is lamentable when they love unworthy men.

Hunter. Is a man unworthy, thinking of his honour?

Boyd. You talk amiss, talking so. History seethes with the error, society is drenched with it. Mary Stuart cared nothing for your honour—nor does Margaret. The lovers are wiser than that.

Hunter. Then I've done with it.

Boyd. No, surely. What is this honour that you extol ?

Hunter. My right, my dignity, my manhood.

Boyd. And you have lived with the philosophers and the poets. Verily a little wind against the reason in our own lives—John, boy, your honour is pride, a poor brute jealousy, cruelty. That is the truth. Will you learn it ?

Hunter. You know nothing.

Boyd. I know all.

Hunter. She has failed me.

Boyd. Why ? Is your wife a light of love ?

Hunter. I believed not.

Boyd. You know it. Does she love Finlay finely—as you would be loved ?

Hunter. As I——

Boyd. As you would be loved ?

Hunter. How can I——

Boyd. No—answer honestly. You know.

Hunter. I tell you she must choose.

Boyd. Be careful—or the choice will destroy you. And it will be of your making, not hers. Remember that.

Hunter. I gave her everything.

Boyd. It was a great gift. And Finlay's is that too, I think. Or was yours but a poor venture,
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the tribute of a little soul? Is Margaret to have Mary Stuart no better luck than that poor Queen? Or can Finlay——? Down there at Holyrood? Look, in the moonlight. A woman of great wit—Margaret is that too. And nothing better coming to her than a scented pimp, a callow fool, and a bully. They should have been three great princes, masters of men. And just that.

[A dog howls across the garden below.]

It's the moon. But her love was magnificent. And Margaret's is. A new unhappy queen? I wonder.

Hunter (rising and moving to Boyd). Look here, Andrew, you can't alter facts by filming them over with dead romances. I gave Margaret everything, and she wants to give me a part at best—nothing, may be. It's a bad bargain, and I won't make it. Damn that dog. *[As it howls again.]*

Why should I allow Finlay to meddle with my life?

Boyd. Your life is but a part of life. It began, and it will go on in time beyond yourself. You and Margaret and Finlay are a part of life, not of some little local interest of your own. Mary knew it. Do you know her poem? It's here.

[He moves to the picture and reads from under it.]

Ill names there are, as Lethington,
Moray, Elizabeth ;
By craft of these I am undone,
And love is put to death.

Though brighter wit I had than these,
Their cunning brought me down ;
But Mary's love-story shall please
Better than their renown.

Mary the lover be my tale
For the wise men to tell,
When Moray joins Elizabeth
And Lethington in hell.

Not Riccio nor Darnley knew,
Nor Bothwell, how to find
This Mary's best magnificence
Of the great lover's mind.

They sing it sometimes in Edinburgh still.
How would you like Margaret to make such a song
of you ? " This Margaret's magnificence of the
great lover's mind." There's a fellow who sings
it some nights down there. And old Andrew Boyd
hears it—three hundred years and more afterwards,
and he knows the truth of it, as all wise men would.

And John Hunter may be forgotten, not like a Mary Stuart, but the thing that John Hunter means will endure, always, and wise men would know the truth of it for ever.

Hunter. Would you madden me ? Why ?

[A voice singing is heard away in the night, faintly.]

I would give anything to know that Margaret loves me—there. But, Finlay—what is there in Finlay that she can't find in me ?

Boyd. A vast, separate, breathing creation of God. Would you dare to forbid a woman's love of that ? You are ambitious.

Hunter. What would she say, do you think, if I loved this woman and that, here and there ?

Boyd. She would despise you. Because you think of it lightly, as an easy and deliberate thing. You don't mean love. You mean a trivial, feathery visiting, that does not know what love is. There he is—listen.

[The voice below becomes articulate as the song ends.]

Mary the lover be my tale
For the wise men to tell,
When Moray joins Elizabeth
And Lethington in hell.

Not Riccio nor Darnley knew,
Nor Bothwell, how to find
This Mary's best magnificence
Of the great lover's mind.

Hunter. It's a damned silly song. What's it all about? A dog singing, and a fool joining in, and you chattering against all sense.

[He moves back to the table.]

Boyd. You are emphatic—the emphasis that knows it is misplaced.

[He goes again to the portrait.]

Look at this Queen. She had wisdom, the wisdom of love. In that presence you could learn; learn to see your story a little more truly, John. She could tell you of courage, which is all, greater than pride or fear. She does tell you, doesn't she? Doesn't she?

Hunter. What does a dead queen know about me? You talk nonsense. The moon has your wits, you're like the crazy singer out there. Mary Stuart can tell me nothing I say. My God! What's that?

[A dress rustles outside on the terrace.]

Boyd. What's the matter? *[He turns.]*

Hunter. There—look—— Who is it?

[Mary Stuart stands on the terrace at the window. She is the Queen of the portrait.]

Mary. Boy, I can tell you everything.

Mary Stuart

[*Boyd and Hunter and the portrait and the moonlit terrace pass into nothingness, and we see Mary Stuart's room in Holyrood on the evening of March the ninth, 1566. Mary is lying asleep on a couch, Mary Beaton seated beside her, reading. After a few moments the Queen moves uneasily, and in again a few moments she wakes.*

Mary. Poor boy—poor boy. If he would but listen—but how strange. What a thing was that to dream? Out there—somewhere in the moonlight—I listened. Dreams should be of the past, surely. That's the way of them, isn't it, Beaton?

Beaton. Of the past—yes—or timeless.

Mary. But this was of some far to-morrow. We are part of life for ever—we become what we are for ever. I heard the old man say it. I heard it in my dream.

Beaton. What was it, madam?

Mary. How long have I slept?

Beaton. An hour, hardly.

Mary. I passed down the ages in an hour. It was in some life when I was an old and argued story. Generations and generations after us. A boy and

his lover, and Mary Stuart breathing again in a new sorrow—the sorrow that is eternal.

Beaton. You were restless.

Mary. I was travelling far.

Beaton. Dreams are full of trickery for my part.

Mary. And sometimes they are the heart of us. How will it be told of me ? I wonder. Not a man for ever, perhaps, to know the truth of it. But the old man knew. If it could be known—that should be good counsel for all foolish lovers, I think. I know love, that at least. Beaton, the intrigues of Europe will destroy me—no, they will. But I know love. If it could be a light to all such poor boys. Where is Riccio ?

Beaton. Shall I find him ?

Mary. No ; I asked incuriously.

Beaton. He grows more daring.

Mary. He sings well.

Beaton. Is that all, madam ?

Mary. Unhappily, with him too. Riccio, Darnley, Bothwell. You must not breathe a word of Bothwell, Beaton. That must not be known. But they make a poor, shabby company. Riccio sings, yes, ravishingly. And no more. Darnley cannot sing even, and he's my husband. Just a petulance—one cannot even be sorry for it. How he hates Riccio—I wish David were better worth

hating. That would be something. And Bothwell Mary Stuart
wants to take me with a swagger. It's a good
swagger, but that's the end of it. I think he will
take me yet, the odds against him are pitiful
enough. But it's a barren stock of lovers, Beaton.
I, who could have made the greatest greater.

Beaton. He may come.

Mary. Craft is against me, my friend. I shall
have no leisure to find the great one. Lethington
works, and my brother Moray works. And Elizabeth
waits. Elizabeth of England—they will do
as she wishes. She knows it, and I know. I am too
beautiful for her. She has poets who call her
beautiful, too. If Mary were their Queen, what a
song it would be. She knows it. It's a little secret
satisfaction that.

Beaton. You match them all, madam, in wits.

Mary. I shall know that till the end. But the
end will be to their hand. Fools for lovers, and fools
to destroy me. Proudly I shall know that always,
being above them in love and wisdom. But love
will cheat me, and my wisdom will spare me
nothing. That is how it is for me. Riccio is not
near ?

Beaton (opening the door). No, madam.

Mary. Then listen. This is made for myself,
but you shall hear it.

[*She sings.*

Ill names there are, as Lethington,
Moray, Elizabeth ;
By craft of these I am undone,
And love is put to death.

Though brighter wit I had than these,
Their cunning brought me down ;
But Mary's love-story shall please
Better than their renown.

Mary the lover be my tale
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When Moray joins Elizabeth
And Lethington in hell.

Not Riccio nor ^fDarnley knew,
Nor Bothwell, how to find
This Mary's best magnificence
Of the great lover's mind.

Beaton. It's well done.

Mary. Truly, at least.

Beaton. Your hair ?

Mary. Yes.

Beaton (arranging it). If I were a queen——

Mary. No, Beaton, you wouldn't, I've told you
that often enough. The nets are too strong, too

well cast. If the Queen's luck is bad, it must be the Queen's luck still. We do not make our choice. The rewards do not consider us. No—the blue pin, so. Hugo Dubois, in an elaborate treatise on the coiffure, says—"women of a fair complexion, coming at night into company, do much affect azure or lazuline gems for the hair, as it were corn-flowers in sunny corn ; and to my mind it does well become them." There—that will do, Beaton.

[*A knock at the door.*

Who is it ?

[*Beaton goes to the door and opens it. It is Riccio.*

Riccio. You are employed, madam ?

Mary. No. Come in, David. Let us be idle. Presently, Beaton. [*Beaton goes.*

Riccio. Idle ? Yes, lady, to receive homage is a business light enough.

Mary. To receive homage lightly given.

Riccio. Yet all queens have found it in their profession, they say. And lightly given ? Worthless, if you will, but not that. Not of Riccio, madam.

Mary. You correct me.

Riccio. I know you as you do not yourself.

Mary. This Holyrood is a grey place. A little phrase will tell.

Riccio. It is the chosen palace of the world.

Mary. Yes, your gallantry has an echo, David, a dear one.

Riccio. Let it be that. I will serve even so.

Mary. France—it is a word that I think will become surfeiting in time, it is so beautiful. France. Too sweet, men will say, lilies too often sung, and stale. But how precious it is. They can love there.

Riccio. We are of the south.

Mary. Yes, you have a good suit there.

Riccio. If you would but listen.

Mary. I listen, daily.

Riccio. I do not persuade well.

Mary. You spare nothing.

Riccio. I am suspect in the palace, more and more. Your lord, the King, chiefly.

Mary. Do you stay in Scotland for popularity? They do not choose your kind, David.

Riccio. Every mile of it is abominable. But I stay, eagerly.

Mary. Why?

Riccio. It is adorable of you to answer so yourself.

Mary. Your wit survives.

Riccio. But you shall not steal my pleasure. You ask, to hear me say it. Yes—I beg—it is so! I stay because the compass moves with you. The

south has all the enchantments of the heart, there are the spices and the music. I can breathe only there, life is valuable only in that zone of supreme devotions. And where you are, is the south. That is why I stay. It's the answer you foresaw ?

Mary. Riccio, with so many advantages. And yet—man, could I but speak for you.

Riccio. I need no ambassadors, madam.

Mary. But you do, Riccio. I could prompt you—but, no.

Riccio. My phrases lack—ah, they grow rusty in these damp airs.

Mary. The phrases are well enough. They would pass in the most elegant of courts, David. Or you should take them to my sister, Elizabeth. She collects them—half the poets of England send her mottoes in this kind. They know better, but it humours her. I myself can match them, excel them, Pierre Ronsard tells me. But what have these to do with me ? I have a husband.

Riccio. A husband——?

Mary. And he is nothing. I should, being Mary Stuart, forget him, but he hangs about the place. And I say that to you, David, to you, licensed with the graces of my lovely France, and with some favours in your remembrance, eh ? And what do you answer ?

Riccio. Answer ?

Mary. God, man, yes, answer.

Riccio. If my lord the King fails, may not
I——

Mary. Console my—exile ?

Riccio. It is allowed.

Mary. A justifiable intrigue ? Commendable,
even ?

Riccio. You know it, madam.

Mary. And what is your device for the occasion,
David ?

Riccio. To tell you this—always and always—
you are the queen of all beauty, the adorable
fragrance of——

Mary. No better than that. You lamentable
steward.

Riccio (taking her hand). I love you, Mary.

Mary (moving from him). And you can say that,
and make it no better than an impertinence.

Riccio. I love you—I will take you—so.

Mary. You have not the stature, my poor David.
Listen. I meant no anger. Sing to me, often.
Your songs come out of a cherished life. Flatter
me sometimes if you will—I am queen enough to
thank my courtiers—and they do not much breed
them here in Scotland. And your manners adorn
ceremony always—I do not undervalue that—the

example is needed. I must not lose you, David, Mary Stuart
I take pleasure in your company, in your amiability
—it is not common. And be content—you will
find in this all necessary satisfaction—I shall not
starve your nature. But it will be well for us not
to speak again of love.

Riccio. To be forbidden that——

Mary. It will be an agreeable distress, never fear.
And perhaps in some fortunate, some—unaccus-
tomed moment of understanding, you may make a
song of me. If it should be so, remember this—
you will make little enough of it now, but, then,
remember it, if you would make the song well.
Mary Stuart was a queen of love, but she had no
subjects. She was love's servant, but she found no
lord. That is all.

Riccio. No subjects. It is cruel to say that—you
know.

Mary. No subjects. Only strangers at the
table.

Riccio. I do not understand you, Mary.

Mary. You have said it.

Riccio. I give you myself—all my poet's heart.
Is it not enough ?

Mary. You are neither subject nor lord. There
is no peace in you, David. Just a buzzing in
the jar.

Riccio. There are men whose pride you should learn for less than this.

Mary. Ah, then.

Riccio. But my devotion will stay.

Mary. It will satisfy you. It is all that matters. And I am grateful. You are a good secretary, David.

Riccio. What is the love you look for ?

Mary. Rest from tumult. Escape. You could not know.

Riccio. No. But I pity you.

Mary. I should reprove you for that. But it's a good venture, the best you could make. It might trouble you. But it will pass. You will think only of yourself to console ; that will be your safety.

Riccio. You will not let them dismiss me ? I am happy here.

Mary. It is right that you should be happy. You shall stay, never fear.

Riccio. To serve you always. I can give light and air a little, that at least. I should have been king in this place.

Mary (*giving him her hand to kiss*). Now you may sing to me.

Riccio (*singing*).

The snows come, and frosty pools
Forbid the birds to sing.

The pilgrim of the wilderness
Complains the tardy spring.

Mary Stu.

One sits at home in winter ease,
And one goes out to find
In thought of one, the third who waits,
But bitterness of mind.

*[As he sings, Darnley comes in unseen. He
sits, at the far side of the room, listening.]*

Who plays with love, beats up and down
The snow beyond the gate.
Who plays with love is like to tell
A spring for ever late.

But this I say, if Holyrood
Had crowned a proper king,
These grey walls had the blossoms worn
Of an eternal spring.

Darnley (not moving—after a silence). King
David, for example ?

Riccio (rising). Sire—we did not know—it was
just a rhyme.

Darnley (rising). We did not know—we did not
know——

Riccio. Not that—I mean—you startled me.

Darnley. David Riccio—you think I'm a fool.

Riccio. Sire——

Darnley. Well—I'm not. It's a mistake to think it. I could make rhymes like that by the bushel if they were worth it. It's a very ugly song, that.

Mary. It was nothing, my lord. A tune for idleness.

Darnley. I am instructed.

Riccio. Shall I make such a one for the King ?

Darnley. As this was for the Queen ?

Riccio. If I have not offended. Would it be Your Grace's pleasure ?

Darnley. There may not be time.

Riccio. Time ?

Darnley. Yes, you know, by the clock. It passes. Tick, tick, tick, tick—and you never know. A rhyme, for instance. You get one line, and then two, and another, and the end may come, suddenly. In king's palaces, that is. Who knows ?

Riccio (afraid). We minstrels delight in parables. You speak in a fine figure, my lord. But—you do not mean that my poor song has angered you ?

Darnley. A thought only for your next. A suggestion. The poet, and time, passing, tick,

tick, tick, and the rhyme on the lips, and then—as Mary Stua
you will. I give it you—it may help invention.

Riccio. And—it means nothing more ?

Mary. Come, David, how should it ? (*Directly
to him*) Poets are men, I hope.

Riccio. Surely, madam. I will work upon it,
sire. A sonnet, perhaps—no, a ballade—and yet,
for the lute——

Darnley. Consider it. (*Going to the door.*)
There is a moon. It helps, I am told.

[*He signs for Riccio to go.*]

Riccio. Your Grace, I am sure, would not mis-
judge me.

Darnley. No.

[*Riccio goes.*]

Mary. What is it ?

Darnley. Shamelessly—so.

Mary. What do you mean ?

Darnley. Always at your ear.

Mary. Well ?

Darnley. What has he been saying to you ?

Mary. It would be tedious.

Darnley. What is he, this fellow ? Your lover ?

Mary. What then ?

Darnley. Am I King of Scotland ?

Mary. Have you—forgotten ?

Darnley. Is he your lover ?

Mary. If he were ?

Darnley. Am I to be common gossip in Edinburgh ?

Mary. Is that all ? No ; he is not my lover.

Darnley. They talk. The Queen, they say, has a sweet instructor.

Mary. I have need of such.

Darnley. What is the instruction ?

Mary. Ask your gossips. The word is not mine.

Darnley. Will you dismiss this man ?

Mary. But why should I ? He is a competent secretary. He sings prettily. He has a grace. Why should I lose him ?

Darnley. Because I ask it.

Mary. But I do not remember you.

Darnley. What wit is that ?

Mary. You speak as one privileged to control my affections. I do not remember such a one.

Darnley. This man governs you.

Mary. Alas, no.

Darnley. He guides your policy. The courts of Europe begin to talk of it.

Mary. Poor David. He just sits at the table, and writes as I tell him. There's more policy in a carter.

Darnley. And he is not your lover ?

Mary. No.

Darnley. Then he would be little to lose.

Mary. And yet why should I lose even so little ? *Mary Stua*

Darnley. I do not believe you.

Mary. So ? And then ?

Darnley. You choose strangely.

Mary. I chose you. God help me.

Darnley. That's ugly.

Mary. What would you have ?

Darnley. What is it to be ?

Mary. How ?

Darnley. I have some rights still, at least.

Mary. You are called king.

Darnley. Then my word should mean something

Mary. For what ?

Darnley. Dismiss Riccio.

Mary. No.

Darnley. Be careful. We are not in France.

Mary. You destroy yourself very thoroughly,
Darnley.

Darnley. Dismiss him—or I'll have it sung in every tavern in Edinburgh. Or worse.

Mary. Do you love me ?

Darnley. What—how do you mean ?

Mary. That's plain enough, man, isn't it ?

Darnley. I have my pride.

Mary. And what of mine ? I'm hungry—do you understand ? All this—my body, and my imagination. Hungry for peace—for the man who can

establish my heart. What do they say—a light lover, unsure always. And who is there to make me sure? What man is there with authority? Where is he who shall measure me? Listen, my husband. There are tides in me as fierce as any that have troubled women. And they are restless, always, always. Do you think I desire that? Do you think that I have no other longings—to govern with a clear brain, to learn my people, to prove myself against these foreign jealousies, to see strong children about me, to play with an easy festival mind, to walk the evenings at peace? Do you think I choose this hungry grief of passion—deal in it like a little poet? All should be resolved and clear in me, with a king to match my kingdom. My love is crazed, a turbulence, without direction. It was made to move in long, deep assurance, moulding me beyond my knowledge. I, who should be love, may but burn and burn with the love that I am not. Where is my prophet? Everywhere blind eyes. I took you, I wedded you, I made you king. And you mince, and gossip, and listen at the door. I could have taught you the finest husbandry that Scotland has ever known. And your soul's policy brings you to this. Your craft—the craft of Scotland's excellence—against the poor half-wit of David Riccio. And you have your pride.

Darnley. That at least. For me the rest is past. *Mary St*
Mary. It has never been.

Darnley. No matter—my pride is my pride I tell
you. Riccio goes, one way or another. I know
my own will—you can't preach me out of that.

[*At the window.*

Look at them, virtuous men and bad men,
priests and wenches, liars and gospel, game and the
hunters—but all of them with a streak of beastliness
in them for the relish of a bawdy tale. And they
shall have it. A wallet full of jingles can be bought
for a few pence, or I have a turn myself :

Who's in the Queen's chamber ?
Master Italian Thrift.
What's the Queen wearing ?
Her long hair and her shift.

Mary. And where's the King of Scotland
To strike us as we sing ?
And where's the King of Scotland ?
There is no King.

Darnley. I won't have it—do you hear me ?

Mary. I do.

Darnley. Again, will you dismiss Riccio ?

Mary. Must I again ? No.

Darnley. Then it is your reckoning. We'll spare you the bawdy songs, perhaps.

Mary. I should.

Darnley. But watch your David—watch him, I say. Keep him close. That's generous of me—to warn you. Perhaps now—this minute, or to-morrow, or to-night. Suspect every footstep. But I tread lightly. A poor king, but a light step—thus—do you see ?

[He creeps to his words towards the door.]

Thus—thus—thus—there's a queen in there, and her lover—a dirty lover—thus we go, and thus—be very watchful, madam, very—do you hear them, the queen and her dirty lover—that tongue should be stilled—it isn't decent, is it ? Then thus, and thus—a light, light tread, eh ?—and thus—ssh !

[He goes out.]

[Mary, watching him go, laughs, but then with misgiving. She rings a bell, and Mary Beaton comes.]

Beaton. Yes, madam ?

Mary. Did you see anything—out there ?

Beaton. I saw the King pass down the stairs.

Mary. Did he speak ?

Beaton. I don't think he saw me. He walked oddly—on tip-toe, as though something were at the corner. And as he went out of sight he half-

turned, and put his finger to his lip, and said, Mary Stuart
“ssh!” very quietly, like that.

Mary. He's a poor thing, very inconsiderable.
But it may happen.

Beaton. What, madam?

Mary. He threatens Riccio.

Beaton. Cannot you satisfy him?

Mary. No. But I have no wish to.

Beaton. We must warn Riccio.

Mary. It would be useless. No, David must take his chance. He knows that there's danger. It's wrong, though, that so slight a man as Darnley should be able to hurt me even so much. Riccio's no matter, really. But if my lord touches him he shall pay as though Riccio were all. Where is Riccio?

Beaton. He was in the yard there, looking out over the town, scraping moss from the wall with his finger. He seemed nervous, I thought.

Mary. That would be monstrous—to have such a man made into a great stake. But it may be.

[Darnley is heard singing below the window.]

Who's in the Queen's chamber?

Master Italian Thrift.

What's the Queen wearing?

Her long hair and her shift.

Mary. That's the King of Scotland.

Beaton. Why not send Riccio away? Why let him be, as you say, a great stake?

Mary. Because there is no other. Because my mind is lost, Beaton. Darnley, Riccio, Bothwell—there's a theme for a great heart to play. And there's so much to do. I have talent—as rare as any in Europe. It should be my broad road—that and my love. And I cannot use it, for my love is beaten up like dust, blinding me. Wanton, it is said. No woman I think was ever so little wanton. To be troubled always in desires—that's to be cursed, not wanton. Little frustrations, and it should be the wide and ample movement of life. I want to forget it all—wholly to become it. And there are Darnley, Riccio, Bothwell. And my power lies unused, it rusts. If I could find peace, if there were but a man to match me, my power should work. Elizabeth should see an example in Scotland. I would defend queenship, and I am brought to defend a poor Italian clerk.

Beaton. Why consider him, or any one of them?

Mary. It's a madness, isn't it? But that's the way. Love is that. We must become love, or it spends us. I am not Mary Stuart—she is a dream unspelt. I am nothing. There should have been a queen, and I am nothing.

[Riccio comes in, scared.]

Riccio. Madam, forgive me. I don't know what Mary Stuart he means—my lord, the King—he came up to me, and peered into my face, strangely, and tapped me on the shoulder, and said—"thieves have irons, and the crow comes, and the south's as cold as the east." He means me harm.

Mary. Come, David, men should have sudden minds. Calamity is with fortune. Courage, friend.

Riccio. He came to me from below. He's wandering about like a silly ghost. He went back.

[He moves to the window—before he gets there, Darnley is heard again.]

Who's in the Queen's chamber ?

Master Italian Thrift.

What's the Queen wearing?

Her long hair and her shift.

Riccio. What's that ? Why does he sing that, under the window ?

Mary. It's a brave house for a queen, Beaton, isn't it ?

Darnley (from below). There's more yet.

[He sings again.]

Is there a scullion greedy

For a crown and a queen's kiss . . .

Mary (*opening window*). Go. Go—I tell you.

[*She closes the window or slams it. Imprecations from Darnley are heard in the yard below, and a window pane is broken.*]

Darnley. Curse you—you harlot—you shall see—— [His voice fades away.]

Mary. The daughter of France. Pupil of Ronsard. Queen of Scotland.

[Darnley rushes in.]

Darnley. Do you think I will be used so—not by any queen in Christendom.

Mary. Do we talk of using ?

Darnley. Do you call me stock ? A thing for japes—to be mocked at by a harlot and her creeping filth ?

Mary. So, we sing our bawdry at the Queen's window ? Where is the King to whip such fellows ?

Darnley. We know the window from another.

Mary. Where is the King, I say ?

Darnley. Looking to his own. David Riccio, I spoke too gently in the yard now. Thieves are honest men—but there are rascals, Italian spawn, creeping things—and heels.

Beaton. My lord, this is the Queen's chamber.

Darnley. Ay, the Queen's chamber—that's it. There are heels, I say—and until then, so——

[He spits in Riccio's face, and rushes out.]

Riccio (moving across to *Mary*, and kneeling to her). *Mary Stuart*
He's mad, he should be held. What shall I do,
madam ?

Mary. What shall the Queen do ?

Riccio. I am afraid.

Mary. Afraid of that ?

Riccio. They hate me here. He has fellows. It
will not be safe for me anywhere in Holyrood. Let
me go back to France—Your Majesty can contrive
it. I must go.

Mary. Leave us now for a little.

[*Riccio rises and hesitates.*

Go. Stay in your room. You shall not be for-
gotten. Go, I say. [*Riccio goes, lamentably.*

Beaton. Madam, madam.

Mary. The measuring is bad, bad. There are
matters that the mind must leave. Could you find
my Lord Bothwell, do you think ?

Beaton. I will try.

Mary. If you will. Or stay—send Randolph
first. Ask him to come here. When he goes, find
Bothwell, if you can.

[*Beaton goes. Mary unlocks a cabinet, and
takes out a picture of Elizabeth in a
jewelled frame, and a paper. The picture
she places conspicuously on the top of
the cabinet, the paper on the table.*

Then from the cabinet she takes a small green cloth case, which also she places on the table. She locks the cabinet, and stands on the far side from the door.

Beaton returns.

Beaton. Sir Thomas Randolph is here, madam.

Mary. We will receive him.

[Beaton moves to the door, and Sir Thomas Randolph, Elizabeth's Ambassador at Holyrood, comes in. Beaton goes. Randolph kneels to Mary, who gives him her hand. He rises, Mary points him to a chair. They both sit.]

Mary. Have you more news of our cousin ?

Randolph. Her Majesty's physician reports complete recovery.

Mary. You comfort me. Even so slight an indisposition is watched by the world with anxiety.

Randolph. I sent special word to my mistress of Your Majesty's concern.

Mary. I count you always among my true friends. That is to be in a small band, Sir Thomas.

Randolph. I am very sensible of the honour, madam.

Mary. My cousin and I should meet. Such affection should not suffer so long a delay.

Randolph. Her Majesty, I know, is of a like Mary Stuart mind.

Mary. If I could but leave this turbulent court for a time. But, alas, I may not. Can we not persuade the Queen to grace our rough life, think you? She is well served. With such counsellors she could leave with an easy heart. The throne of England knows no insecurities.

Randolph. Her Majesty talks of it often.

Mary. Do you think she will so favour us?

Randolph. I am sure of her inclinations.

Mary. And yet, perhaps, not quite sure.

Randolph. Madam?

Mary. Randolph, I am a woman beset by fools and rascals. Do with that as you will. If I could meet my cousin of England, word to word, she might learn much.

Randolph. She desires that.

Mary. I wonder. To learn might mean admissions. And admissions are dangerous, are they not, even royal admissions?

Randolph. Your Majesty speaks by figures.

Mary. No; plainly. You have your poets. They should tell you what a figure is. But I speak plainly.

Randolph. And yet, madam, not plainly for so plain a man.

Mary. Ambassador from the Court of England ?
No, Randolph. Elizabeth sends no poor brains on her business. Though I have heard that her wages do not always measure the service.

Randolph. Madam——

Mary. There, there—it's no treason to hear.
And I am not a subject of England—yet.

Randolph. A subject ?

Mary. One might be a subject of England, or one might be Queen of England—eh, Randolph ?

Randolph. Your Majesty can instruct me.

Mary. A subject—or no, that's unlikely ; a forfeit rather. Or Queen. Is it not so ?

Randolph. How could I say, madam ?

Mary. Does not Elizabeth say it ?

Randolph. Elizabeth ?

Mary. Yes, man. Does she not say it ?

Randolph. I cannot say that I have heard Her Majesty——

Mary. Come, Randolph, you are not uninformed.
Does she not say it, and fear it ?

Randolph. You insist above my knowledge, madam.

Mary. Then answer this, as an honest man. If I leave my kingdom here to its dangers for such time as it may need to travel into England, will the Queen welcome me—receive me even ?

Randolph. I can hardly answer that, madam, here. Mary Stuart

Mary. Do it by messenger, Sir Thomas, and say no. Not—the Queen's high majesty laments that these present dispositions of her realm—and so forth, in some Cecilian strain, but, bluntly, no.

Randolph. You speak hardly.

Mary. I defend myself. That is all. Though defence is nothing. You might let our cousin know, in some lighter moment, perhaps, that Mary Stuart thought thus—that if she could have found peace and not have been destroyed by base and little lovers, she would have met and instructed the surest wits of England, and have delighted in the match; but that, being tired, she said it was no matter. Enough, then, but this. Cunning has no pleasure when the heart is breaking. If I ask my cousin to appoint a day, she will not do it.

Randolph. If I might advance the matter as I can——

Mary. Oh, be simple about it, Randolph. Forget your diplomacy—I'm not worth it. Moreover, fate has touched me, and I have a discovering vision. Your genius, my poor Ambassador, fades in the climate of my grief. Policy shines when it is pitted against interest. But my interest knows the doom that is coming. Let us talk as friends, with death appointed. I shall not betray you.

Randolph. Madam, I have my allegiance. But all that devotion may offer is yours. And you speak too hopelessly.

Mary. No. Hope I have mastered—that at least. I shall not want courage, and it may be years. And I shall make a good end. That is all.

Randolph. If some affairs could but be composed, the Queen, I am sure, has good will to you and Scotland.

Mary. To Scotland—where is Scotland, which faction is to be called Scotland? And for me, I tell you, no. Her hope is my destruction; you know it. If I stand before Europe in honour, how long can my cousin delay naming me to her succession?

Randolph. It is her daily dread.

Mary. Dread?

Randolph. Anxiety.

Mary. Dread will do. She fears a Catholic invasion of her throne. That's as may be, but she fears it. My nomination would foster it, she says so herself, daily, in dread. My discrediting would be fortunate. She must be hungry for any word against me—that could be used. There would be royal thanks—if no more—for news of Mary Stuart's offending. Could she be shown, as a wanton, let us say; or, better, would she but

provoke my Lord Darnley to some violence—what Mary Stuart possibilities were in that. What nets.

Randolph. It is grievous that you should think so.

Mary. Think? Are there not letters? Secrets that miscarry? Messages that are overheard? England has her eyes, who knows at what keyhole, and we must profit by example. Even I have those about me who are diligent.

[She unfolds the paper on the table.]

“To His Grace, my Lord of Leicester, from Sir Thomas Randolph, Ambassador at Holyrood from the Court of England. My Lord, I learn that the quarrel between Her Majesty and the King grows. He of whom I told your Lordship has many marks of her favour, which the King has been heard to say do much discredit him to be so slighted for an Italian jay. So far that much is intended, as I think, against the intruder, even to extremity, which indeed may also glance at majesty itself, and so strike, as it were, to the root. Or if that be not so, and Master David only be practised against, then the Queen’s anger must be such as will not easily be paid, and all that is hoped for may be between her and the King. I am, my Lord, your Lordship’s humble servant, Thomas Randolph.”

Randolph. Madam, I have but to convey what falls out. I set it down, merely. I desire nothing.

Mary. "All that is hoped for."

Randolph. By some.

Mary. By my cousin. But we needed no letters. It shall not be kept against you.

[*She gives him the letter.*]

And I have a mind that will care for no reckoning—you need not fear. You do but set it down. But I wished you to know. I shall lose, but I know what moves in the dark. There are no surprises, be sure of that.

Randolph. Is there anything that Your Majesty would have me do ?

Mary. Be a little sorry for your office, that is all. And remember me as I might have been. You know.

Randolph. You should have been fortunate, madam. You would have borne it greatly.

Mary. You are right about Darnley. He sings bawdy songs at my window.

Randolph. That is lamentable.

Mary. No, it is part of the story. You might have heard him half an hour since. But do not believe all that you hear. David Riccio is nothing. I protect him, as I would my spaniel. But he will serve England's purpose well enough. Let it be. You play your recorder still ?

Randolph. Yes, but indifferently.

Mary. Well, I thought, when I heard you. Mary Stuart
Here is a precious one, of very mellow tone.

[She takes it from its case.]

It belonged to our French poet, Pierre Ronsard.
Keep it for my sake. I ask nothing in return.
There is nothing you can do. Ronsard was a
chivalrous poet. I would have you keep it.

Randolph. It shall instruct me, madam.

*[They rise, and he kneels as she again gives
him her hand.]*

Mary. Adieu.

Randolph. Madam.

[He goes.]

*[Mary moves to an open Prayer Book and
turns the leaves.]*

Mary (*reading, very quietly, to herself*). "And
in the evening they will return : grin like a dog,
and will go about the city. . . . Unto thee, O
my strength, will I sing : for thou, O God, art
my refuge, and my merciful God."

*[She stands silent for a moment. Then rings
the bell beside her. Beaton comes.]*

Mary. Did you find my Lord Bothwell ?

Beaton. He waits your word.

Mary. Ask him to come. First draw the curtains
and light the candle.

*[Beaton does so, while Mary reads again the
same passage aloud.]*

“ And in the evening they will return : grin like a dog, and will go about the city. . . . Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing : for thou, O God, art my refuge, and my merciful God.”

[Beaton goes, and Mary closes the book. She stands at the desk, her back to the door. Bothwell appears.]

Bothwell. Madam.

Mary (half turning). My lord.

Bothwell. You sent for me.

Mary. You were not seen to come ?

Bothwell. No. Not that I care for all their eyes.

Mary. But you must. I have small reason to cherish security I know ; that is past. But this would confuse things too much. They will destroy me, but I will not help them too generously. So this must not be known.

Bothwell. I understand.

Mary. Will you help me ?

Bothwell. Madam, I have no interest but to please myself. To please you is that.

Mary. Darnley threatens Riccio.

Bothwell. Shall I trip Darnley ? But why should one be concerned for Riccio ? There should be better ambitions.

Mary. They think he's my lover. Or Darnley

occupies his mind in a pretence that he thinks it. Mary Stuart
Let him think it—it is no matter.

Bothwell. Surely not Riccio ?

Mary. No. But I did not send for you to question me. Riccio has served me well enough in his kind. I remember these things. He is in danger, and he must be saved. That is all.

Bothwell. What can I do ?

Mary. He must leave Scotland, secretly, and at once. Can you contrive that ?

Bothwell. It could be done. There is a Dane in port now. I will give word to the captain. I have his service. Tell Riccio to meet me at midnight, by Frobisher's Croft. I will have a fellow to take him out from shore. When they are clear they can carry a light, and the Dane shall take him up. He can make his own way from Copenhagen ?

Mary. Surely. Riccio shall be there at midnight. And my thanks. [*She offers her hand.*]

Bothwell (taking it). No more ?

Mary. It must not be. No—not yet.

Bothwell. Woman, why do you waste yourself among crowns and peddlers ? Who is Elizabeth—who Darnley ? What is Scotland, a black country, barren, that it should consume this beauty ? You were born to love, to mate strongly, to challenge passion—this passion, I tell you, this. They come

to you, and plead as peevish boys, or watch round corners—winds that cannot stir one tress of that hair. You are not aware of them, you are unmoved. But I am not as these—do you think I will wait and wait? I do not plead. I bid your love to me. Mary. Mary. You know it, you know.

Mary. Don't. Think.

Bothwell. But I have thought, and it is enough. You may desert all, but not this.

Mary. Listen. You woo well—boldly at least. Better than Darnley ever did, and Riccio has no more than a little elegance. And he whines. So did Darnley. But you have courage. You are aflame, and I kindle—yes, I tell you so much. What then? Should we leave Scotland? No. Queens are limed. And here, what is there for us but stealthy moments, fugitive? I should burn to them, but they would but add more smother to my life. I do not know what may come—I love you, yes, if you will—but no hope is in it, none. For I must tell you. I am of those who must be loved always, for all things, for there to be any peace in love. If you, or any man, could fathom that—ah, then. You love me now, you love my beauty. It needs love, it cherishes your love, it sings back to your hot words. But my beauty is not all. It will pass, and I should be unsatisfied. For you

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could not love me always, for all things. There Mary Stuart is nothing between us but the minute. You could give me that, but you have nothing else to give.

Bothwell. And then? Shall the minute be denied?

Mary. That's good. You make no pretence, even. But remember, there is no hope in it, there can be none. Even were Darnley less husband than he is, and I free to take you to the throne, there would still be but the minute between us. You are not the man. He will not come.

Bothwell. I am no schemer in my love. Policy's a game—there I'm all wits. But love comes, and is now. You are beautiful, Mary. You betray no one. What remorse can there be?

Mary. Remorse? No; love is remorseless. But frustration always, always.

Bothwell. Not of our minute—not of that, I say.

Mary. No, then, not of that.

[Bothwell takes her in his arms, she giving herself passionately. After a moment they part, as Mary Beaton's voice is heard.]

Beaton (calling from without). Madam—madam.

Mary. Yes, what is it?

Beaton. Madam.

Mary. Yes, yes—come in.

Beaton (entering). Madam, the King is crossing the yard—he may be coming here.

Mary (to Bothwell). You must go.

Bothwell. Why should we slink about for any king ?

Mary. No—you must. There are confusions enough. [*She looks out from the window.*]

Yes, he is coming. Go through the Close—quickly. At midnight, remember.

[*Bothwell kisses her hand and goes.*]

Beaton. You play very dangerously, madam.

Mary. Beaton, love should be lucky for you. I think it will. But for me. . . . He took me in his arms—a moment's fury—fire to slake fire, and that is all. That is my most of love. Why should I not be dangerous ?

Beaton. Do you love my Lord Bothwell ?

Mary. A little of me—a moment. There is so much else to deny myself, after all. But he means so little more than the others. Still, a little—it is something.

[*Darnley comes in.*]

Darnley. Where has he gone ?

Mary. Who ?

Darnley. Who ? The Italian.

Mary. He is in his room, I think.

Darnley. I saw him go down the far stair as I Mary Stuart came in from the yard.

Mary. You are mistaken, I think. Beaton, will you see ? *[Beaton goes out.]*

Darnley. You know his movements well. But someone went down.

Mary. You are curious.

Darnley. Yes, madam. I must watch these fellows.

Mary. Fellows ?

Darnley. Who knows—one, and another perhaps.

[Beaton returns.]

Beaton. Riccio is in his room, madam.

[Beaton goes.]

Darnley. Then, who was it ?

Mary. Have you any purpose in coming ?

Darnley. Who was it ?

Mary. A shadow, perhaps.

Darnley. By God !

Mary. The King then.

Darnley. The King—what king ? Who was it ?

Mary. You are tiresome.

Darnley. Very well then—look to it that Riccio's matter is not all.

Mary. Riccio's matter ?

Darnley. The settlement with him.

Mary. Why did you come ? It was not to see

a shadow, or a king, or a fellow, or what you will ?

Darnley. I came as a friend to warn you. About treason. Do not shelter it. Lest harm coming to it should soil you, too.

Mary. Treason, sir ? You speak to the Queen.

Darnley. To be sure, yes. I forgot. I thought it was to one who played with the Queen's paramour. I thought I would warn her. I grow forgetful—I am so busy. A little scheme I have in hand about the Queen's honour. That's you. Yes. In two days, or three, or before, perhaps. Pardon me, madam, I should not intrude in the Queen's chamber—one never knows who may be in it. That shadow, now ; I wonder. I must investigate — it might mean another scheme. Once you begin . . . I have a better tune for the song now — but another time, another time. But I would not shelter it.

[He goes. Mary takes Elizabeth's picture, looks at it in the candle-light, and replaces it in the cabinet, then rings the bell. Beaton comes in.]

Mary. We will have supper here to-night. Tell them, will you ? And ask Riccio to come. Come in when you have told them below, and prepare the table.

Beaton. Yes, madam.

Mary Stuart

[She goes. Mary takes a purse from the cabinet, sits, writing a letter, and a moment later Riccio comes in.]

Riccio. Madam, the King was here again ?

Mary. It's ill-named for him, but he was.

Riccio. I saw him on the green from my window. He was with my Lord Ruthven and two or three others, talking. I am afraid. What shall I do ?

Mary. All is arranged. You are to meet the Lord Bothwell by Frobisher's Croft at midnight. A boat will be ready, and you will wait out at sea till a Danish ship takes you up. From Copenhagen you must make your own way to France. Here is money, and a letter to be delivered to Monsieur Carmé in Paris. He will help you if you need it.

Riccio *(taking the purse and letter)*. Thank you, madam. If I could but serve you better. But fate is against me.

Mary. Yes, my poor Riccio, fate is against you.

Riccio. I fear for you in this place. There's wickedness in it. If I were but happier in my fate—to shield you.

Mary. You must not let that trouble you. You have done what you could. We are but ourselves. Keep this.

[She gives him a brooch from her sleeve. He

takes it and kisses her hand. Beaton comes in.

Mary. And now we can talk as friends, with no misgiving.

[She goes to the door and turns the key.
Beaton, David leaves us to-night. A friendly sail to Denmark has relieved us of our anxieties.

[Beaton puts wine, cups, and fruit on the table. They seat themselves. They eat and Mary pours out the wine.

Riccio. If you were but coming to France, madam. In a month, how the glades will shine.

Mary. I have them in my mind. Though there are times when one lives too fiercely for the mind's landscapes to be clear. They come in tranquillity. Let us drink to France, the south, where the sun is.

[They drink.

Riccio. And to the Queen whose beauty is like Provence. To Mary Stuart.

[He and Beaton drink.

Mary. Would I were a better toast.

Riccio (to Mary Beaton). You should see the south, mistress. I hear talk of a love match—the Lord Ogilvy of Boyne it is said. It would make a sweet honeymoon.

Beaton. I am sure you have a shrewd judgment, Master Riccio.

Mary. Now, David, we will have none of these Mary Stuart encouragements. Must I lose all my friends ?

Riccio. There's an old fellow in Toulouse there who cobbles and makes flutes. There were never flutes like them. To hear one is to have the words come pit, pat, and there's a song as soon as you will. Everything there grows like that. Here it is as though one were under stones, damp, pressed down, all gloom. But there—ah, but madam, you know.

Beaton. You are glad to go ?

Riccio. It all comes back—how can one help it ? Though it is grief to go from so sweet a service. Even the wine is brighter there. My papers, madam—shall I deliver them to you ?

Mary. Yes—before you go. Will you remember Mary Stuart when you hear the cobbler's flute ?

Riccio. I shall remember her always.

Mary. Safely at least I hope, David.

Riccio. But I have no choice in going, madam ?

Mary. None. Life will be none the more civil for your loss. I will say that. Now sing to me for the last time, David.

Riccio (singing).

Green shoots we break the morning earth

And flourish in the morning's breath ;

We leave the agony of birth

And soon are all midway to death.

While yet the summer of her year
Brings life her marvels, she can see
Far off the rising dust, and hear
The footfall of her enemy.

[As he is ending, the handle of the door is turned, and then there is a loud knock.]

Mary. What's that ?

[The knocking is repeated. Riccio and Beaton rise.]

Mary (to Beaton). See what it is.

[Beaton goes to the door and opens it. Outside is a low murmur of voices. Darnley comes in.]

Mary. What does this mean ?

Darnley. There are envoys here to speak with the secretary of the Queen.

Mary. They send a strange herald. Do kings turn grooms ?

Darnley. I was coming——

Mary. But we sent word below that we had retired.

Darnley. And so the door was locked. I know. But a husband may be capricious. I found them, asking for the secretary of the Queen. They are waiting.

Mary. Let them come in.

Darnley. It is the secretary.

Mary Stuart

Riccio. Who are they, my lord ?

Darnley. Who are they ? Shall I go and ask them ?

Riccio. Does Your Grace not know them ?

Darnley. It is dark out there.

Riccio. Shall I go, madam ?

Mary (to Darnley). You swear you know nothing of this ?

Darnley. I ? Swear ? Oh, yes, I swear.

Mary (softly). No, Riccio, I will go.

[*She moves across to the door. Then, loudly—*

Go, Riccio. See what they want. Your cloak—it's cold beyond.

[*She takes up Riccio's cloak and throws it round her. Darnley, watching her almost in a dreadful hope, creeps away from the door. She is about to move out when Beaton stops her.*

Beaton. Madam, this is wildness. Either it is nothing, or you take on a danger that you must not. (*To Darnley*) Why may they not come in here ?

Darnley (indifferently). I know nothing, I tell you. If the Queen wills.

Mary. Very well. Go, Riccio.

Riccio. Is it safe ?

Beaton. They would not dare, at the Queen's door.

Mary. Go. There can be nothing to fear. And we do not govern fate.

[Riccio goes out. Darnley moves across to the door. He locks it and takes the key.]

Darnley. The Queen has retired. Let us talk.

Mary. Why do you lock the door ?

Darnley. I found it so—I thought it was the Queen's will.

[There is a loud scream outside, and running steps towards the door, which is beaten violently as Riccio tries to enter. Then, a struggle and scream upon scream. Then silence, and footsteps hurrying away.]

Mary (to Darnley). Open it !

Darnley. I should have questioned them more closely.

Mary. Open.

[Darnley unlocks and opens the door upon Riccio's body.]

Mary. For shame ! A poor simpleton like that.

Darnley. I was in the Queen's chamber. And no one knows. No one in Europe would believe it of the King of Scotland. But I was careless. I should have questioned them more closely.

[He steps out over Riccio's body and goes.]

Mary (after a pause, looking down at Riccio). A Mary Stuart
fantastic nothing. Poor fellow. But the reckoning
shall be as though for a great lover. Go, Beaton.
Bid them come up. Have the watch summoned.
Let him be taken away. This is his poor little
tragedy. Ours remains. Go.

*[Beaton goes out. Mary closes the door.
She goes to the window, and draws back
the curtain, filling the room with bright
moonlight. She looks out, silent for a
few moments, and then sings softly.*

Mary (singing).

Though brighter wit I had than these,
Their cunning brought me down ;
But Mary's love-story shall please
Better than their renown.

Not Riccio nor Darnley knew,
Nor Bothwell, how to find
This Mary's best magnificence
Of the great lover's mind.

*[The candle gutters out. She throws the
window open to the balcony. Voices,
as of a dream, are heard from beyond.
Mary stands listening.*

First Voice. It's a damned silly song. What's
it all about . . .

Second Voice. Look at this Queen. She tells you, doesn't she, doesn't she ?

First Voice. What does a dead queen know about me ? You talk nonsense. The moon has your wits, you're like that crazy singer out there. Mary Stuart can tell me nothing I say.

[*Mary goes along the balcony, out of sight.*

My God ! What's that ?

The Voice of Mary. Boy, I can tell you everything.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

The same room, a year later. It is night-time. Mary Beaton is reading at the table by candle-light. Once she goes to the window and listens, then again from her reading to the door. She returns again to the book, and after a few moments there is a knock at the door. She opens it to Bothwell, who comes in.

Bothwell. Is the Queen here ?

Beaton. No, my lord. She is at Kirk o' Fields with the King.

Bothwell. The King—yes.

Beaton. He is very ill.

Bothwell. Ill—yes.

Beaton. She should be back soon.

Bothwell. I have business. I will return.

Beaton. Shall I tell the Queen ?

Bothwell. You are very faithful to the Queen.

Beaton. I can be that at least.

Bothwell. I, too.

Beaton. My lord ?

Bothwell. Have you noticed any change in her ?
Towards the King I mean ? Do not be afraid—I
am safe.

Beaton. She pities him because he ails.

Bothwell. No more ?

Beaton. I think not.

Bothwell. No fresh affection ?

Beaton. That could never be.

Bothwell. She is in danger.

Beaton. Always, I know.

Bothwell. But especially. Now—to-night.

Beaton. She hazards so much. She goes about un-
attended. It would be so easy. What must I do ?

Bothwell. Will you be instructed ?

Beaton. Indeed—for her safety.

Bothwell. There is a design against the King.

Beaton. How ?

Bothwell. And against the Queen.

Beaton. If you are warned, is it not enough ?

Bothwell. You have to help. I have to go very cautiously. I cannot do all. There must be someone who has the Queen's ear, and then we may be hopeful. You can save the Queen—but you must be exact.

Beaton. I would not fail.

Bothwell. The King is sick. He may die. He lies there without physicians—a slight fever it seems, but these things are sudden. If he were to die it could be small grief anywhere—eh ?

Beaton. And yet it is a man's death. I do not think he is so ill as that. The Queen does not think it either.

Bothwell. Listen. These lords have grown ambitious to extremity. The King is in the way. To-night they will work. The King's end is near. And they will seize the Queen or it is their intention. Then everything is to their hand.

Beaton. But this must be told. I must go—the Queen must be told.

[She moves towards the door. Bothwell stops her.]

Bothwell. That would be useless. Besides, there are eyes everywhere. Nothing will happen to the King until the Queen leaves Kirk o' Fields. She will not be harmed.

Beaton. But what is this—are you one in the Mary Stuart design ?

Bothwell. I know of it.

Beaton. But the King—not that—I do not understand.

Bothwell. With or without me, the King's end is fixed. That was inevitable. And I care nothing for the King.

Beaton. But to conspire against him—his death.

Bothwell. It was to be, I tell you. They were resolved, nothing could have shaken them. Not that I had any anxiety to shake their resolution. But I did not devise it—I merely know of it.

Beaton. I care nothing for the King—he has been monstrous. But that. What am I to do ?

Bothwell. You cannot meddle, nor should you.

Beaton. And the Queen ? Are you in that design, too ?

Bothwell. Again, I am informed merely.

Beaton. What will you do ?

Bothwell. Save her.

Beaton. How—to what ?

Bothwell. I love the Queen—and there is no one who can give her more in this starved country than I, giving her that. You know it—she has said as much to you, her friend—come now ?

Beaton. I think——

Bothwell. Yes, yes. You know it. Well, to-night there will be a swift stroke, deadly, up there at Kirk o' Fields. There will be no traces left—all is very cunning. Then they will come here, every foot of the way is prepared and watched, and the Queen will be taken.

Beaton. But if she were warned ?

Bothwell. What guard has she ? They would be powerless—these lords have worked everywhere. It would mean a little more bloodshed, that is all. They have reckoned against all mishaps.

Beaton. But surely something can be done ?

Bothwell. Yes, by us.

Beaton. Tell me.

Bothwell. The lords think I am with them. They are in meeting now ; within half an hour I must be there. Presently you will hear disaster—it will be plain. Before they can get here I shall return, and the Queen must leave with me.

Beaton. But you said that every way was watched.

Bothwell. That is it. You must help there.

Beaton. What do you mean ?

Bothwell. What is that ? [*He goes to the door.*]
I thought I heard her. Quickly then, and mistake nothing. There are two things for you to do. Use her mind to some disaster that is near—say you overheard something—fear that there is con-

spiracy against her. If she comes before I go, I Mary Stuart can say nothing directly of that—she might suspect I knew something about Darnley—that I knew more than was said. She would call her guard, send them out—it would confuse everything and prevent nothing.

Beaton. But is that honest ?

Bothwell. Honest—what is honesty to-night ? I must get the Queen away I tell you. Darnley is beyond our saving. If not to-night it will be to-morrow or to-morrow. There is devilment everywhere. I must take her. Darnley gone, she shall be safe with me. I will defend her, and she shall starve no longer in her heart. To-night it can be done. Play upon her fears—let them work. Tell her that I, and I alone, am her safety if disaster comes. She will listen—her love is ripe for that. You serve her so, never fear. That is your charge in part. And then this. The Close is watched by Colin Bruce. It is our only hope. You have some influence with him ?

Beaton. He has said so.

Bothwell. Use it. Let your wits tell you how, but use it. When you hear disaster, as you will, see that Colin keeps the south side of the Close for an hour, leaving the Pine row clear. Can you do that ?

Beaton. I will try.

Bothwell. That, or we lose. You shall join us. The Queen can learn all in due time. And do not fail anywhere.

Beaton. I will serve as I can.

Bothwell. Ssh! She is coming.

[The door is opened, and Mary Stuart comes in, cloaked.]

Mary. You?

Bothwell. I heard you were up there alone. I feared for your safety.

[Beaton takes Mary's cloak and goes into the far room.]

Mary. Why should you fear? I do not.

Bothwell. But you must. Danger moves everywhere.

Mary. I am on terms with danger. I am used to it.

Bothwell. But for those who love you——

Mary. Those—who are they?

Bothwell. For me who love you.

Mary. Man, do you love me so well?

Bothwell. You know it.

Mary. You believe it.

Bothwell (taking her and kissing her). We know it—don't we—don't we?

Mary. I told you—it was a year ago, nearly to

a night. You remember, when Riccio—at that Mary Stuart door. There was but the minute between us, I said. It has been for a year—or you have persisted for a year. It is much, more than was likely. It's a black night—it makes one think of shelter, the shelter that is found nowhere, for me.

Bothwell. Why do you deny yourself always, thus ? Why do you not believe my devotion ? What gain is there in this refusal and refusal ? Come away with me. Your throne means nothing to you as the time is—your authority is drained on every side—you are threatened daily. The lords work against you—England waits the moment that seems to her to be almost here—the certain moment. Leave it all. Come with me.

Mary. No, it cannot be. All would be lost then, irrevocably. There is the King still.

Bothwell. Make me your commander. Give it out that the perils of treason about you make your withdrawal necessary. Let me be known as your soldier. They may believe what they will—it is a story strong enough against misproof. We can wait—we can strike more safely from a distance—you can be the better established for it. Here, who knows what bad chance may fall ? It is policy I plead, sound policy—and it gives us our love.

Mary. No—no—there is the King I say.

Bothwell. But he is nothing to you, nothing surely ? After all this—Riccio remember, and——

Mary. I need no remembrancers. It is in my heart, all of it. But he is sick, rather pitiful. And for your policy—how if the Queen forsake her husband when he is sick ? What will Europe say to that ?

Bothwell. What does Europe know of Darnley's sickness, or care ?

Mary. It would learn, and there are those who would make caring their business.

Bothwell. Woman, woman, why do you persuade against yourself ? You know it is good counsel I give. Your blood knows it. You do not want courage ?

Mary. Perhaps.

Bothwell. Take it from me.

Mary. It would be none, so. But I do not think my courage is at fault. Your love could not better me ; I fear that.

Bothwell. You want my love, burningly you want it.

Mary. I know—yes. But for an enterprise like this love must be durable. Yours would fail—it is not a fault in you, but it would.

Bothwell. Even so, what then has been lost ?

Mary. A shadow merely—a hope, a little hope, I do not know of what—but that out of some fortunate moment, somehow it might come.

Bothwell. What ?

Mary. The love that should save me.

Bothwell. But time goes. Danger is here, now. And I love you, now. Your love, your shadow—where is that ?

Mary. I know. But in my heart it is all I have left. Nothing, a poor nothing—but all. If I go with you, it is but one step farther into the darkness, the last. Even the shadow would be lost. I am too wise in grief. I am wiser even than my blood. That's lamentable, isn't it ? But I have come to that.

Bothwell. If the King were dead ?

Mary. How do you mean ?

Bothwell. He trails in your thoughts still.

Mary. I tell you no.

Bothwell. Why do you risk the night to see him then ?

Mary. Little gusts of compassion, I suppose.

Bothwell. I told you.

Mary. But he is nothing. Do you need to be told that—Darnley, who has been a malady in my life, and even so is I think forgotten.

Bothwell. Mary, I am strong—stronger to-night

than you are. If I thought that Darnley—but no I do not think it.

Mary. There is an echo in that.

Bothwell. An echo ?

Mary. A year ago, Darnley himself in this room It was Riccio then.

Bothwell. It is no matter. I tell you that I am for your lover—that nothing can change that—that I am stronger than you. Life here has no meaning for you—it may have disaster. You know that I have reason in my words, and you will not listen. Again, will you dare, now, and greatly ? It is security, it is our consummation. Will you come ?

Mary. If I should waste all—it might be as good an end as another. But no, no—the chances are too small.

Bothwell (again taking her in his arms). Do you not feel that my prayer has authority—my bidding. You are in my arms—you are no queen, you are my subject. If you stay they will destroy your throne—if you stay you will destroy yourself. You have fires. Can you quench them ? *Mary,* my beloved, I am stronger than you. Come. I bid it.

*[Mary stays a moment, bound in his arms.
Then she slowly releases herself.]*

Mary. It is magnificent. But I told you. I am Mary Stuart wiser than my blood.

Bothwell. Then, listen. I know these lords—they thrive in every corner about you. Your hours are known to them, and you know hardly the servants in your hall. They may strike here, or there, but it will come. I shall watch. But I am one only. Think of all I have said. Let your blood remember it, too—let it grow wiser—know it for your best wisdom. And when the blow falls I shall be near—look for me. They mistrust me, but my wits are as good as theirs. And when I come again on this errand, it may mean choice at but a minute's rate. And then you will answer as I bid you. Look for me, always. No moment is safe, and I am ready.

[*He goes.*

[*Mary makes the least sign of a movement after him, but it is checked immediately. Forlornly she goes to the far door.*

Mary. Beaton.

Beaton. Yes, madam (*entering*). So late and alone. Why will you do it, madam? Not a doorway is safe for you.

Mary. Now, Beaton, not you too. I will not be scolded. I must go to bed.

[*She goes into the far room. Beaton arranges a small table, with mirror, comb and*

brushes, candles in the right place. She is singing Mary's song to herself. After a few moments Mary comes back, wearing a long straight gown. She sits at the table, her hair being combed and brushed by Beaton as they talk.

Beaton. How is the King, madam ?

Mary. The fever passes. A day or two should mend him.

Beaton. Must you go again ?

Mary. I promised. I owe him nothing, and he cares nothing for me. But sick men are poor creatures. One cannot wholly disregard even a sick Darnley.

Beaton. Is he content at Kirk o' Fields ?

Mary. He asks always to return here. But I will not have that—that at least I am fixed on. Even the people accept that now.

Beaton. One hears so much.

Mary. What have you heard ?

Beaton. It is better that you should not be with the King, I think.

Mary. Yes. But why do you say that now ?

Beaton. There are mutterings—conspiracies I think.

Mary. What do you mean ?

Beaton. These lords would gain all.

Mary. What have you heard, Beaton ? What Mary Stuart is it ?

Beaton. I was walking this afternoon. I came on two men at a yard corner. They were talking. I heard a phrase or two. "Darnley—there's the obstacle," one said, and the other, "Yes, if the Queen were moved, it would be nothing with Darnley about still."

Mary. If the Queen were moved ?

Beaton. That's what he said.

Mary. Who were they ?

Beaton. I do not know. They saw me then, and were gone.

Mary. How moved ?

Beaton. I don't know, madam. But these men would stay for nothing, I am sure of that. I have been faithful to you, madam ?

Mary. You only I think, Beaton, my girl.

Beaton. If I might counsel you.

Mary. What can I do ?

Beaton. I love you, madam, but I am nothing. There is only one strong friend about you.

Mary. You mean Bothwell ?

Beaton. You know it too. I am glad.

Mary. Has he been prompting you ?

Beaton. Only speaking out of his anxiety.

Mary. What would you have ?

Beaton. I would trust all to him. There is no one else.

Mary. Did he speak of Darnley ?

Beaton. Of Darnley, madam ?

Mary. Of Darnley.

Beaton. I know that he is not loved.

Mary. Did he speak of him ?

Beaton. Something, I think. But I thought only of his anxiety for you.

Mary. What did he say of Darnley ?

Beaton. Gossip. Nothing.

Mary. But what was it ?

Beaton. Only of dangers, creeping here and there.

Mary. Be plain. What was it ?

Beaton. No more than that. No—that was all.

Mary. So.

Beaton. The King must take his chance. As we all do here.

Mary. Yes. As Riccio did. There was no more ?

Beaton. No, madam. Do consider my Lord Bothwell. If there should be any sudden extremity I mean.

Mary. He has many advocates. Three of us. It was a year ago, Beaton. Poor fellow, just at the door. How it comes back. And the King's bawdy song—do you remember ? He has taken

to them since, it is his chief occupation. It was Mary Stuart a poor ugly little villainy. Why do I trouble even to visit his sickness ? We are strange.

[There is a light tapping at the door.]

Mary. What is that ?

[The tapping is repeated.]

Mary. See who it is.

[Beaton opens the door. Darnley is there, white-faced in a black cloak and hood.]

Mary. What is this ?

Darnley. I had to come. I am afraid. When you had gone I grew more afraid. I stole out.

Mary. But this is folly. You are sick. You should be abed.

Darnley. Mary, let me stay here.

Beaton. Madam, you cannot——

Darnley. This woman—who is she—send her away.

Mary. Leave us, Beaton.

Beaton. Your pardon—but I beg you, madam——

Mary. Leave us. *[Beaton goes.]*

Mary. Why do you come ? It is madness.

Darnley. I know. But I am afraid I tell you. I am watched. Men were in my steps, things moved in shadows as I came.

Mary. You must go back.

Darnley. For God's sake, Mary, let me stay.

Mary. No. It is too late for that.

Darnley. What have I done ?

Mary. Everything—nothing.

Darnley. I will mend. I will love you, Mary, love you.

Mary. That is intolerable.

Darnley. I am afraid.

Mary. Why should I bear your fear ?

Darnley. I meant nothing.

Mary. You have spared me nothing.

Darnley. You still harp on Riccio.

Mary. No, I have forgotten him. I remember you.

Darnley. I saw another man out there. Was it Bothwell ?

Mary. Again you begin.

Darnley. Was it Bothwell ?

Mary. Can you learn nothing ? Go away.

Darnley. Let me stay.

Mary. No, I tell you, no.

Darnley. What is Bothwell doing ?

Mary. Go.

Darnley. Very well then. I killed Riccio, damn you.

Mary. Go.

Darnley. I killed him out there. I was here, in the room, here, but I killed him. Let Bothwell

watch—I have experience. You are a miserable Mary Stuart Queen, I'm glad of that.

Mary. Go, I tell you.

Darnley. No, no—let me stay. I am afraid.

Mary. You are shameless. Go.

Darnley. But you will come to me again. That at least. I do you little good, you say ; perhaps, but you are strong. You keep fear away.

Mary. I have no anger for you. But expect nothing from me. You make it impossible.

Darnley. I'll go. I would have loved you. But I hate you, I hate well. The dirty Italian learnt it. Bothwell—he's better game, isn't he ? You pretty harlot of Scotland.

[He goes out, merely a hysteria. Mary locks the door, and listens for a moment. She moves away, and at once there is a knocking.]

Mary. Who ?

Darnley (outside). Let me come back. I am afraid I tell you. Mary—Mary.

[Mary does not answer.]

Let me come in. Harlot—harlot—harlot. I killed Riccio. I told you I would. I'm going.

[There is silence, while Mary sits at the table, her fortitude at breaking point. She regains herself and calls.]

Mary. Beaton.

Beaton (*entering*). Has he gone ?

Mary. Life is poisoned, all of it, all of it. Barbs, barbs. Beaton, my girl, my girl.

[*She breaks down and sobs in Beaton's arms.*]

Beaton. Madam—my darling, my darling. You poor queen—there, there.

[*The strain passes and Mary rises.*]

Mary. I must sleep. Give it me.

[*Beaton fills a small phial and gives it to her ; she drinks it. As they prepare to go, another knock, sharp and open, comes at the door.*]

Beaton (*at the door*). Who is it ?

Randolph (*outside*). Randolph. Can I speak to Her Majesty ? It is urgent.

Mary. Open.

[*Beaton does so, and Randolph comes in, carrying a document. He bends to Mary's hand.*]

Randolph. Your pardon, madam, for this late intrusion. But messengers from England have arrived in the night. Can I speak with you ?

Mary. Be seated.

[*Beaton goes and Mary and Randolph take their places at the table.*]

Mary. You are late.

Randolph. You have been gracious to me, madam. Mary Stuart I would be of some service.

Mary. What is it ?

Randolph. I do not know who is the informer, but there are bad reports in London.

Mary. Of whom ?

Randolph. Of events here.

Mary. Events ?

Randolph. Projects, rather.

Mary. How bad reports ?

Randolph. I go beyond my duty in coming thus. But I remember.

Mary. What are the reports ?

Randolph. It is said that the King's life is threatened.

Mary. Who says it ?

Randolph. I am not told.

Mary. Threatened—by whom ?

Randolph. It is said that Your Majesty could tell.

Mary. But . . . You do not believe that, Randolph ?

Randolph. I do not, madam.

Mary. It's a cunning throw. Very. You know that it is impossible ?

Randolph. What, madam ?

Mary. That I should. . . . Randolph, you know

the King is a poor enough thing in my life, you cannot but know it. But not that. Even he could not make me as contemptible as that.

Randolph. I am sure of it. That is why I came.

Mary. What have you to say ?

Randolph. There may be a conspiracy against the King. It is not unlikely. If it prospers, it is clear from this (*the paper*) that your name will be spoken.

Mary. What am I to do ?

Randolph. We must work and at once. Hours are precious—if it is moving, any moment may be chosen. We must discover the springs. I will help as I can. You must warn Darnley—it is your best defence. I suspect some—Lethington, shall we say, and—you know them. They are very secret, and they have set suspicion towards you.

Mary. I will go to Darnley now, to-night. Can you know that ?

Randolph. Indeed, fully.

Mary. You are generous.

Randolph. It is my wish, madam.

Mary. Shall I bring Darnley here ?

Randolph. As you think. It would be dangerous, but brave. It might tell.

Mary. Come to me in the morning. Whatever comes, I thank you. It was chivalrous of you.

Randolph. You instructed me, madam.

Mary Stuart

[She gives him her hand and he goes.]

Mary. Beaton.

[Beaton comes in.]

Mary. I must go to Kirk o' Fields.

Beaton. Not again to-night, madam.

Mary. Yes, now.

Beaton. But, madam——

Mary. I tell you, now. Ask no questions—there is danger up there, and I must go. My cloak.

Beaton. Madam. I implore——

Mary. Beaton! . . . Bring my cloak.

[Beaton fetches the cloak and helps her mistress.]

Mary. It's a strange errand. An anniversary—in a month it would be a year, Beaton. . . . And now, by the door where he died, to save one by whom he died. It's fantastic living, profitless living. There. I may bring the King with me.

Beaton. Madam, but why? You should not be with the King, not to-night.

Mary. It must be. What do you know, Beaton?

Beaton. Nothing, madam, nothing, but I am afraid.

Mary. You too. Courage seems so simple. Surely we can come to that, at least. You need not wait for me.

Beaton. Madam, if I could but tell you—I do not know——

Mary. Girl, what is it? All the evening——

[Out of the silence the thunder of a great explosion is heard, reverberating across the night. Mary stands fixed in astonishment, Beaton shaken with fear.]

Mary. What was that?

Beaton. What was it, madam?

Mary. Do you know?

Beaton. Something terrible has happened.

Mary (throwing the window open). It was up there. It was at Kirk o' Fields.

Beaton. It was something terrible.

Mary. What did Bothwell say to you?

Beaton. Nothing, nothing—it was nothing. What have they done?

Mary. You are lying.

Beaton. Madam, I love you. I am afraid. I do not know what to do.

Mary (taking off her cloak). Find Sir Thomas Randolph. Tell him to come here.

[She goes, carrying her cloak, into the far room. As Beaton moves to the door it is opened by Bothwell.]

Bothwell. Where is the Queen?

Beaton. In there.

Bothwell. To the Close, at once, and do not fail. *Mary Stuart*
All depends on that.

Beaton. I am sent to Sir Thomas Randolph.

Bothwell. To the Close, I tell you. No, this way. Go. [*Beaton goes out by the main door.*]

Bothwell. Madam, Mary. [*Mary comes in.*]

Mary. You have come.

Bothwell. Yes.

Mary. What has happened ?

Bothwell. As I foretold. Kirk o' Fields is destroyed.

Mary. Darnley, too ?

Bothwell. Yes.

Mary. And now ?

Bothwell. They are coming here.

Mary. They must come.

Bothwell. They will take you, and what then ?
And they have contrived suspicion against you.
You must come with me. What better reason ?
You have been warned, you know of the treason,
you know that it aims at you, too. Escape was your
only way. Who can question that ? And I love
you, Mary—come. You have no choice. To-
morrow you can proclaim me leader of your arms.
The present here is destruction. There, in the
future, who knows ? We can play strongly. And
there is no other way.

Mary (after a moment's pause). Either way, I am snared. But I will go.

[*Bothwell hurriedly fetches her cloak.*

Bothwell. Quickly; they will be here. We can get across the Close. I will see. Quickly. A moment only.

[*He goes out by the far door, Mary stands at the open window, putting on her cloak. Randolph comes in.*

Mary. The summons came too late.

Randolph. The summons?

Mary. I sent for you.

Randolph. I had no summons.

Mary. It is no matter.

Randolph. You heard—out there?

Mary. Yes.

Randolph. Was it the King?

Mary. Yes.

Randolph. Darnley—dead.

Mary. Darnley was nothing. As Riccio was nothing.

Randolph. What will you do?

Mary. I am going.

Randolph. It is well. With whom?

Mary. Bothwell.

Randolph. Bothwell?

Mary. Yes. Bothwell—is nothing.

Randolph. May fortune be with you.

Mary Stuart

Mary. It will not. We become what we are for ever. How strange. Do you ever dream, Randolph ?

Randolph. Madam, can I do anything ?

Mary. Good-night, Randolph. [*He goes.*

Mary. We become what we are for ever. We are part of life for ever. It was a year ago. Poor boy—poor boy. If he would but listen. What a thing was that to dream. Mary Stuart can tell me nothing I say. Poor boy.

Bothwell (from beyond). Mary ! . . . Mary !

[*Mary does not answer. Then she half turns to the direction of Bothwell's voice, and slowly moves towards him.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Appendix of Masques

- I. *An English Medley* (1911)
- II. *The Pied Piper* (1912)
- III. *The Only Legend* (1913)
- IV. *Robin Hood and the Pedlar* (1914)



An English Medley

TO GEORGE CADBURY

The Chorus sings.

As we shape the new day without sparing
The labour of heart or of hands,
We mingle our song of wayfaring
With songs that were sung in the lands
Where the wine was uplifted
To gods who have drifted
Long since to the house of oblivious reign ;
Where our fathers wrought
Of their fiery thought
A story that knows no stain.

It flows as a torrent unturning,
The tale of the heroes of old,
Whose blood in our blood now is burning,
Whose passions our passions enfold,
And proud is the story
And flushed with the glory
Of Egypt and Rome and the sorrows of these,
And washed with the joy
And the tears of Troy,
And foam of the Grecian seas.

And of this the green land of our dwelling
How sweet is the story to build.
As we shape the new vision, compelling
All hearts to the hopes unfulfilled,
We forget not the passion
Of men who could fashion
Free spirits and fierce in the days long ago ;
Whose hands were strong,
Who wove a song
For the ageless winds to blow.

I

THE MAKING OF THE RYKNIELD
STREET

The Leader of the Chorus speaks.

A thousand years ago to the greenwood home
Where our fathers lived with little of art, there
came
A rumour out of the shining streets of Rome
Of armed men all charioted in flame
And girt with battle's might.
And they brought the tameless will and the con-
quering sword,
And were masters here, for a space, of our mellow
land,

And they tuned our fathers' heart to a new accord, An English
That man from the ways of war might turn his Medley
hand

To the comelier arts of light.

[A group of Britons, women and children, carrying fruit, bread, etc., enter. They collect wood and make fires and erect tripods over them. After a time men come in from hunting, bringing game and fish, which the women begin to cook over the fires. The men lie down round the fires, the women talking to them about their hunting and so on. While they are doing this another man runs on, excited and frightened. He goes to the middle of the group, as if instinctively for protection, and pointing in the direction from which he has come, he cries out—

The Romans ! The Romans !

[The women huddle together ; the men snatch up their spears ; some rise, whilst two or three lie with their ears to the ground. The First Briton, an old man, their leader, speaks.

First Bri. (quite quietly). How far ?

The Man (still very excited, gesticulating). A

bowshot, perhaps two. I saw them an hour ago on the hill at King's Norton. They were in front of me. I could not pass them—not until they went into the trees. Then I ran—look, you can see them—there.

[The men all prepare themselves to fight, not so much angrily or resentfully as prompted by their natural desire for action and their constant readiness to meet danger. They hide the women behind the trees. There is a confused shouting and rushing to and fro—

The Romans! Robbers! Kill—we'll kill them! I fought with them in Kent—

and so forth. They work themselves up into a state of aggressive courage, and are about to go off to meet the Romans, when their leader holds up his spear and stops them.

First Bri. A few spears, and the wild talk of children. You are mad. These Romans have swords and little shields that a strong man could not bend with the blow of a hammer. Their Emperor Cæsar watches them from Rome and they pass through the world, not as men to battle, but as destinies to impose themselves. We've heard of them as they have come from the white cliffs

and across the great river. You, who fought with them in Kent, you know. We are no more than a few chattering crows beside their eagles. I am an old man, and death is nothing, but you are to build Britain, not mock her with a little blustering and shouting when the wind is in your teeth. These men bring with them from Rome wisdom and counsel of many things. They will not harm us. Put down your spears and listen.

An English
Medley

[The men obey him and fetch the women from their hiding-places. A Roman messenger enters, speaks to the leader of the Britons and goes out again. The women come out into the open and talk rapidly with the men, all looking out into the direction in which the Romans are coming.]

[The Roman column enters. The soldiers are not at all like the Roman soldier commonly seen on the stage. Having marched a number of miles through rough country in summer heat, they are dusty, hungry, and tired. They halt, and their leader speaks.]

Roman. Is it peace ?

First Bri. Peace. We are few and unskilled.

Roman. Few or many, if you fought we should break you, but that is not our purpose. To those who receive us in peace it is of peace we talk.

First Bri. First you need food—we have it.

[He signals his people to give food to the Romans. They all sit round the fires together, eating and talking, leaving the two leaders in the foreground. While these two talk, the Britons become more and more interested in what they are saying, and gradually gather round them, the Roman soldiers remaining round the fires.]

First Bri. What have you to tell us ?

Roman. This Britain is divided. She must be one.

Briton. How, one ?

Roman. How far do you go from your homestead in a day's hunting ?

Briton. Twenty miles, maybe.

Roman. And beyond ?

Briton. Beyond ?

Roman. Yes. What do you know of the Great Britain beyond ? The tale of a minstrel, perhaps, rumours as from a distant land or the gossip of a new queen's women. North and south there are waiting to be built markets where you may give and take ; east and west might you find friends and new wisdom. A man may not live for ever at his own hearthstone. There he must beat out the

knowledge he has gathered in many places from many lips.

An English
Medley

Briton. How can we go to far places ? Enemies are everywhere beyond our own hunting-grounds, and Britain is of great length.

Roman. Men must pass freely one by the other up and down the land, and stay one by the other's door. So will they be no longer strangers with doubting eyes and threatening hands. Across Britain and from end to end broad white roads shall run out. They are to be the veins, veins for the new life-blood. Over heaths and commons and the long smooth hills, where there are now a few paths to drive cattle, we will teach you to throw out these great arteries where the life of Britain shall pass to and fro unhindered. Kinsmen and merchants and messengers from one man to another.

[The Britons are now standing round him, interested.]

Briton. But how shall they be made, and where ?

Roman. Already they are growing. By the south shore of Britain they make the Ermine Street. From south to north creep up the Fosse and Watling Street. Here through your home will pass a fourth. It is called the Ryknield Street. From

the sea to Winchester, over the Wolds by Stow, northward through your lands, climbing up to the borders of Caledonia. We must labour. Are you willing ?

The Britons. Yes, yes ! The roads, the roads !

Roman. We will teach you. You shall build with us. You shall carry the road a few leagues on its way. We shall build it truly. It shall stand a hundred years—a thousand. The children of generations shall know it. It shall become one of the immemorial avenues of time. Come.

[The Romans form up into line. The Roman leader unrolls a scroll and points out stations to the Briton, who follows him eagerly. He then indicates the direction to be taken in dumb show. The two go out together, followed by the Roman line in swinging march, the Britons with them in ragged disorder.]

The Leader of the Chorus comes forward and speaks.

From Dover cliffs to Mersey sands,
To Lincoln's coast by Devon lanes,
Still run the roads wrought by the hands
Of Rome ; across the wooded plains
And uplands rich with elm and oak,
By croft and spire from sea to sea,

Still pass the feet of travelling folk
By ways that rose at Rome's decree.

An English
Medley

Into the chronicles of time
Have passed a thousand storied years,
Since these ye saw sang out their prime
Of laughing days and days of tears.
And still we tread their Ryknield Street
That sweeps across our Midland home,
And there in dreams we yet may meet
The ghostly legions out of Rome.

The Chorus sings.

There's a glory now in England
Of green and gold,
And the story now in England
Again is told,
Of the blossoming of June,
Of ceremonial June,
Of the green and golden glory and the clustered
coloured boon.

There's a whirr among the meadows
Of twinkling wings ;
There's a stir among the meadows
Of wild wood things.

And a consecrated pride
Is on the full June-tide,
And the shining gates of heaven now on earth
are open wide.

The pipes of God are fluting
By brake and pool ;
The pipes of God are fluting
Where leaves are cool—
Piping, piping through the days,
All a-chorussing the praise
Of a thousand scented summers with the
buttercups ablaze.

“Come away then to our revels,”
The June hours call,
“Give a day then to our revels,”
The rose-leaves fall.

Let all sweet things of mirth
Blossom now to laughing birth,
While the blue and golden weather falls from
heaven down to earth.

GINGERBREAD FAIR

The Leader of the Chorus speaks.

In the dim hour before the rosy dawn
When Chaucer woke to song and Langland dreamed
His early vision on the Malvern Hills,
The blood of England quickened in the dark.
When the third Henry reigned a lyric note
First fell from English lips, and minstrel strings
Were touched by English fingers to the praise
Of heroes consecrate by memoried war.
The miracles of God were wrought anew
By nameless poets and by players rude
At festival within the city gates.
Life stirred among the shadows. Swift and far
Rumours of laughter ran through English homes
And set a madness in the market place.

*[She is joined by two others from the Chorus,
who speak.]*

First. You shall see here a very strange company :
Merchants and pedlars—

Second. Wise men and fools ;

First. Good honest men—

Second. And a reasonable sprinkling of knaves.

First. Nobles and mummers—

Second. Poor fellows who will tumble any way you will for twopence.

First. Jigging men and minstrels. Old men and their wives stepping from their plough-lands and pasture-lands up and down the country.

Second. Young men and young women, too ; all agog for their fairing.

First. All with their wits awake.

Second. All of 'em feather-hearted for Gingerbread Fair.

[They move back to their places. Two or three pedlars and merchants with pack-horses arrive and are shortly joined by others. They set up their brightly-coloured booths and arrange their wares. A few stragglers and early arrivals watch them, and their numbers are gradually increased by men and women of all ages and conditions, coming in from every direction. Among them are wrestlers, jugglers, minstrels, and a troupe of dancers. They take up their places between the booths, laughing and talking all the while, and bantering and bantered by the onlookers. The chatter and actions are those which rise at the moment directly out of the work which they are doing. The gathering continues

to grow in numbers and the noise and excitement increase.

An English
Medley

[*Two of the William de Birmingham's followers come in and are recognised by their livery ; then enter William de Birmingham and his family and the Bailiff and Burgesses. They are acclaimed by the people—*

*De Birmingham ! The Lord William
de Birmingham ! Long life to de
Birmingham !*

*and so forth. The Crier comes forward
and shouts—*

O yes ! O yes ! O yes ! Let all manner of persons, of whatsoever estate, degree or condition they be, having recourse to this Fair, keep the peace of our sovereign lord the king. God save the King !

[*The fair begins. Tumbling, wrestling, four-men fights (i.e., men wrestle mounted on men's shoulders), dancing, minstrels singing, all attract their separate groups of spectators ; the booth-keepers cry their wares and a Merry Andrew runs among the crowd, jesting and collecting pence. The de Birmingham pass from one stall to another and look at the different performers. Constables patrol the fair.*

[*A rough stout fellow engages in a dispute with one of the merchants, and becoming heated upsets a large tray of gingerbreads and kicks them in all directions. He is taken by two constables and brought before de Birmingham. The people gather round, shouting to others to come—Pie Powder! Pie Powder!*¹

[*The Merchant comes forward and speaks.*

Merchant. My lord, this villainous fellow has destroyed a good heap of my gingerbread.

Man. He provoked me—said I was a vagabond.

Merchant. He is a vagabond, my lord—a bad rogue. He beat me a year come Michaelmas.

de B. Did you so?

Man. Serve him right. He's a meddlesome jackanapes.

de B. But you must not beat good citizens.

Man. He's not good, sir, he's a prying John.

de B. What's your name?

Man. Will, sir, Will of Northfield. A very good name, Will, sir—your name, sir.

¹ The Court of Pie-Powder was instituted on the ground at all fairs throughout Europe for the administration of rough and ready justice and the settlement of disputes arising out of the business of the fair.

de B. Yes, Will, but you must not spoil an honest man's gingerbread.

An English
Medley

Will. He's not honest.

de B. Come, come, Will. I've had to talk to you before.

Will. No, sir.

de B. O yes, Will, I have, haven't I? Come now.

Will. Yes, sir.

de B. Well, you'll be beaten next time. For this you must sit in the stocks, and don't be quarrelsome again, Will.

Will. No, sir. Thank you, sir.

[Will is taken away and put in the stocks, and the fair resumes its bustling, excited way. A messenger comes in hurriedly and breathless. He enquires of the people and is brought to de Birmingham.]

de B. Well, from whom?

Messenger. From my lord, Simon de Montfort.

de B. Yes, yes—what?

Messenger. This, my lord.

[He hands a scroll to de Birmingham, who reads.]

de B. Where do they gather?

Messenger. On the Severn, below Evesham.

de B. And the Prince?

Messenger. He will come, my lord, to-morrow—the next day, perhaps—in a week. They are waiting.

de B. I will come. Go.

[The messenger goes out, and de Birmingham speaks to the principal people around him ; the rest listening at a distance.]

de B. My lord of Leicester is preparing. The royal oppressors are moving on him with a great army. He does not know when or whence they come. I must be with him. Come, wife. We must prepare.

[The de Birminghams and their retinue go off, followed by many of the people. Two of the citizens talk while the merchants take down their booths and pack up their goods.]

First Cit. Battles again ; always battles. What is it this time ?

Second Cit. I don't know. The barons say the king's a tyrant, and he says they're tyrants.

First Cit. And what about us while they're fighting over it ?

Second Cit. Ah ! that's it. The barons say the king oppresses us and the king shouts back that they oppress us, but they don't either of 'em mind about our being oppressed. What they can't stomach is that anybody should do the oppressing

but themselves. So they batter one another's heads in for the right to prod us about as they like. Take my word, master, king or baron, it's all one to us, but it's vexing cussed of 'em not to come to a mind about it. We want a king who will rule with the people and not against 'em—just you think about it, master.

An English
Medley

[They go out separately. The merchants, performers, and the rest of the spectators go off in different directions, as they came in. The man is left alone in the stocks, and a constable seeing him releases him. Will snatches the constable's cap and belabours him, and follows him out running, the constable crying out as he goes.]

The Leader of the Chorus speaks.

The sound of all their laughing dies,
And the grey dust is on their lips;
The rower Death has closed their eyes,
And set them on his phantom ships.

Yet, borne across the ghostly tide,
Some echoes of their laughter fall
On shores where men still read the wide
Blue skies and hear the dream-winds call.

III

THE STORY OF A PEOPLE

The Chorus sings.

We have forsaken many things
Of holiness and high intent,
And fettered are the shining wings
Whereon our tameless discontent
Should sweep along the starry skies,
And cleave the cloudy veils of God ;
We stand not blameless in the eyes
Of men whose hands have bent the rod
Of bondage and the sword of shame,
And set a glory to our name.

We are not free : we follow ways
Wherein no hero shadows go,
We break our faith, and sell our praise,
And lay the crowns of beauty low.
Yet errant through our souls, we keep
Some passion of the mounting will,
And through our darker watches sweep
Great gleams of joy unshaken still ;
We yet have dreams among the gloom,
And still a voice cries from the tomb.

And now to-day we crown a king,
The latest of a lordly line,
And beating in our hearts we bring
The blood of men whose spirits shine
Forever over English ways,
Whose names in golden letters writ
Are still a glory to the days,
And still a burning splendour lit
Above the world eternally,
For all the sons of men to see.

[The Three Leaders of the Chorus come forward, and the Second speaks.]

Chorus II.

Upon our lips the chiming speech
That Chaucer shaped and Shakespeare swung
Skyward with swift adventurous reach,
That Milton crowned, and Shelley flung
In arrowy fire. Within our hands
The sword that Drake and Cromwell bared,
And Nelson lifted in the lands
Where all heroic heights were dared.
High-hearted, proved and proud we bring
These to the crowning of our king.

[The Three Leaders of the Chorus are joined by the Spirit of History. She carries her

tablets, and writes as she moves up to them.

Spirit. Hail!

Chorus Leaders. Hail! All hail!

Chorus II. What things do you write?

Spirit. In London is a great passing up and down of men from many lands: and from coast to coast the banners are flying, and the walls of the cities are garlanded, and I see proud colours in the countryside. A new king's name is on the lips of all the people. There is a shouting going up from the green ways of England and a great sound from the iron throats of the cities. Of this I write. They are to crown a king.

Chorus II. That must be a fine thing to see.

Spirit. A fine thing truly. I have seen the coming and the crowning of many kings, and have watched them pass into the shadows, leaving behind them a name and a story.

Chorus II. Tell us of these.

Spirit. It is a high tale, wrought of the moving strands of a mighty people striving and overcoming, and sinning and learning new wisdom in the passing of their sin, carving flaming figures on the windy fields of the world. You shall hear of them:

Come forth, with a tale on your lips,

An English

You who have given to men of our English land Medley

A heritage proud as the passing of golden ships

Through jewelled seas with a thousand heroes
manned.

Three Leaders of Chorus. Come forth, with a tale
on your lips.

Chorus II.

We are bearing the crown to a king

Whose name shall be written with theirs who have
given the glory

To us and our land, and now with his praise we
would sing

The praise of the men who have fashioned in
England a story

Immortal to have and to hold, a pride and a trust,

That never in English hearts shall the will be
broken

That has held the crown of her kings above the
dust—

Of these, O pageant of years, some word be
spoken.

*[Then follows a Procession of the Centuries,
each century wearing the dress of the
period. As each in turn finishes his*

speech with the Chorus and the Spirit, he takes up his place beside them as his successor appears.

First comes the 11th Century.

Spirit. Tell us what things saw ye.

Three Leaders of Chorus. What kings, and what tale of deeds,

In this land of the Northern Sea.

11th Century. I saw two kings. One, the Norman lord, William, who slew Harold at Senlac, and conquered England and made it his own. He made the book that you call Domesday, wherein he chronicled the estate of a land newly knit up in promise of great things to be. And William, his son, whom men called Rufus; he built the Hall at Westminster. I watched the dawn rise on a people, the long faint hour of dawn.

The 12th Century takes his place.

Spirit. Tell us what things saw ye.

Three Leaders of Chorus. What kings, and what tale of deeds,

In this land of the Northern Sea.

12th Century. Henry, he who cherished what a man then might have of learning, Beauclerk;
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Stephen, a king of comely parts, loved of the people; the second Henry, shaper of laws, the first of the Plantaganets; and Richard the Lion Heart, mighty in war and loved in legend and gossip of the fireside. These kings I saw, and the Crusades in Holy Land, and Becket, the proud priest who fell at Canterbury, and Robin Hood and all the merry fellows of Sherwood. I knew an England still untutored, but an England moulding hearts to her great destiny, an England bearing brave men and setting whispers of freedom in their ears.

An English
Medley

His place is taken by the 13th Century.

Spirit. Tell us what things saw ye.

Three Leaders of Chorus. What kings, and what tale of deeds,

In this land of the Northern Sea.

13th Century. To the people's hands, when John was king, came first some tokens of power; in London one was made Mayor, and at Runnymede the King's seal was set on Magna Charta. I saw first gather together the Commons of England when Henry, the third of his name, was throned. These I saw, and the first Edward, and a people moving with an unconquerable will towards the light.

The 14th Century follows.

Spirit. And you, what tale was told,

Three Leaders of Chorus. While you held your
reign of years

In the land of green and gold ?

14th Century. I saw England under a weak king,
Edward the son of Edward, smitten by Bruce at
Bannockburn ; and a greater Edward, with a noble
son, the Black Prince, lend a glory to her name
on the fields of Poitiers and Crecy ; and the
second Richard, dreaming away the strong sinews
of a kingdom. Wyclif I saw transmuting the
Word of God into English speech, and I heard the
spring song of Chaucer and the laughter of his
motley pilgrims. An England waking, and writing
her name before men's eyes in the calendar of the
world.

*And he, too, makes way for his follower, the
15th Century.*

Spirit. Say, what things have you seen ?

Three Leaders of Chorus. In the land of gold and
green.

15th Century. The fourth Henry, and the people
taking charge of the people's purse, and the fifth,
Harry of England, victor of Agincourt and king of

one Dick Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and his son, the sixth Henry of his name, a poor sort of fellow, he who burnt Joan of Arc for a witch. Edward the fourth, and Caxton printing in Westminster, and his boy, Edward the fifth, king of an hour and done to death. These I saw, and the Red Wars of the Roses, and Richard the third who fell at Bosworth, a fierce king driven to things of ill-fame. And the seventh Henry, first of the Tudors, who built ships for England, when a ship from Spain bore Columbus to a new world. An England all astir, waiting but for a sign to burst asunder all bonds and stand exultant in the full day, aquiver with full life.

An English
Medley

*With broad-shouldered swing, robust and eager, the
16th Century takes his place.*

16th Century. Nay, nay, ask me nothing—I'll tell all. Henry of many wives, a wild, capricious Henry, but ruling by the will of his people—an odd sort of Henry, but a great, for all that. Then the young Edward's six years, and five more with Mary of the stern and heavy spirit. And then, fortune on me, Elizabeth. Faith! what names with Elizabeth—Drake and Hawkins and Howard and Frobisher; Marlowe—say it again—Marlowe,

and shining Philip Sydney, and Walter Raleigh—all names of good enough quality without adornment of words. And rare Ben Jonson, and then Shakespeare—there's a name to give a smack to the lips—Shakespeare, William Shakespeare, got of good Warwickshire breed. I could go on this half-hour—a string of 'em, a roaring, great-lunged crowd of 'em—wild blood in all their veins and stout arms and good music on the tongues of every one of 'em. What an England was mine—a world's wonder to the crack of doom.

He is followed by the 17th Century.

Spirit. And you—what thing can you say ?

Three Leaders of Chorus. In the land of the oak
and the roses

What tale was told in your day ?

17th Century. For a space the flickering of the flame lit by yon thundering fellow. But then a new desire in England, Milton building his song, and Cromwell tempering the fierce life of a land. A gravity and great austerity of spirit falling upon blood run riot. Four Stuart kings ; levity broken by an iron-willed breed of men, men who grew uncharitable and rude, but set a new zeal in the heart of England. Glory degraded into tinsel,

and purged again into a new splendour. I wrought
on that same fellow's rich and abundant ore, and
forged the sounding metal that is yours in England
to-day and for the days to come. I saw Scotland
move to make a greater Britain, and I left William
of Orange master of a land established in the story
of the nations, with great warriors looking back
to the heroic dead, and great poets beating into
changing music songs of their forefathers, whose
names were sounded from the mountain tops.

An English
Medley

The 18th and 19th Centuries follow together.

18th Century. Anne and three Georges—England
struggling from the proud years of a glorious youth
into measured life. Then a new passion in her
blood and a new strain of music.

19th Century. And Nelson writing his name in
imperishable fire at Trafalgar, and the sounding
guns of Waterloo, and then a few years of the
fourth William, and we saw the crown at West-
minster taken by a woman, Victoria the Good.

*[These pass to the rest of the Centuries, and the
Spirit of History speaks to the Leaders of
the Chorus.]*

Spirit. The tale is told, all of it that you need
from me.

Chorus II. A mighty chronicle.

Spirit. What glory has been since, cherish ;
what of error, purge. The Peacemaker ye knew
and loved. He, too, was of this great line, his
feet followed that host of whom you have heard.
And his people with him gave much to the building
—they, too, will stand in the tables of a race whose
name will shine with those of Greece and Rome,
Egypt and the peoples of the East. You inherit
greatly : much is given you and much is for you
to give. Consider it well. The English name
may not be lightly worn. And a new king is
crowned for you. Grace to him, and light, and
the love of all you who will work with him to
the glory of a land glorious in the annals of the
earth. To you all, peace and goodwill ; your days
will find their ceremony here (*pointing to the tablets*)
and to our new king all peace and goodwill blown
from all the winds. Come, you shadows of years
that have gone down the avenues of time, we go
to the crowning of a king. I bid you all (*to the
audience*) be with me in spirit. God save the King.

[*She speaks to the First Leader of the Chorus,
who then turns to the audience.*]

First Leader. She bids you all to rise and shout
“ God save the King.”

[*They all pass away.*]

The Chorus sings.

An English
Medley

A little time they lived again, and lo !
Back to the quiet night the shadows go,
And the great folds of silence once again
Are over fools and kings and fighting-men.

A little while they went with stumbling feet,
With spears of hate, and love all flowery sweet,
With wondering hearts and bright adventurous
wills,
And now their dust is on a thousand hills.

We dream of them, as men unborn shall dream
Of us, who strive a little with the stream
Before we too go out beyond the day,
And are as much a memory as they.

And Death, so coming, shall not seem a thing
Of any fear, nor terrible his wing.
We too shall be a tale on earth, and time
Our pilgrimage shall shape into a rhyme.

With coloured threads of laughter and of tears
They wove a pattern on the crowded years,
And wove aright, and we are weaving still
From dawn to dusk—God grant we weave not ill.

The Pied Piper

A Tale of Hamelin City

TO THE WORKERS OF BOURNVILLE

An open place outside the city walls. A bowling green with benches alongside, marked off by posts and chains.

In the right distance the city gate and part of the walls, with roofs and towers of Hamelin beyond. In the background masts and sails from the river. In the left distance open country.

Procession from the country into the city. The band at the head, then the Mayor and Corporation, then the citizens of all ages and degrees. Last of all, the Piper, in a long black cloak, his yellow pipe slung over his shoulder.

Two or three citizens saunter out and doze on the benches; others join them. Some begin to play bowls while others watch. Two citizens in the foreground, a Tanner and a Baker, talk.

Tanner. It's a long day, I'm thinking, Master Baker, since poor folk like us did no work of a morning.

Baker. Ay, and me with a wife and four at her skirts. It's a cruel thing to have no food to rise

up to and none to sleep on. (*To the players*) It's an odd thing to be playing bowls as though there were puddings in plenty ; it's a hard-hearted thing, to my mind.

One of the Players. Heavy hearts and light stomachs are bad fellows, Master Baker. If I'm to starve, then I'll starve cheerful.

An Old Citizen. You're a noisy fool. See here : I've been to the wars, and I've been shut up in a city six months, and men lying dead in the streets and none with time to bury 'em, with stones and arrows a deal commoner than crusts. And I tell you these plaguey rats are beastlier things to fight against than any two-legged sons of Satan.

Tanner. A plague upon 'em !

Baker. Plague on that fat mayor of ours, say I. Isn't a mayor the man to keep a city straight and decent ? Isn't it a mayor's job to put down thieves ? And here's a band of whiskered, long-tailed thieves that squeak in our beds and sack us of our victuals, ay, and scarce leave us the gutter to walk in, and this worshipful fat mayor gibbers and does nothing.

The Old Man. You're right. They'll drive us out of the town unless something is done, that's what they'll do. I've not slept these three nights, and I forget the taste of anything but bacon rind.

The Player. Well, maybe they'll manage some-
thing this morning, though it's like enough they'll
do nothing but talk.

Tanner. We'll do some of the talking, too.
Come along.

[Two citizens come running to them from the city gate. They are talking excitedly.]

Citizen (shouting as he comes up to the group).
They've got into the Town Hall. It's full of them.
We went to get ready for the meeting, and the
floor swarmed with 'em, and they were on the
seats, scores of 'em, and right in the middle of the
mayor's chair sat one nigh as fat as the mayor
himself.

The Other Citizen. Peter has told the people
they are to meet out here. They are all coming.

[As he speaks, the gates are thrown open and a great crowd of folk, men, women, and children, some ragged and starved-looking, pour out. They are led by Peter, a great, aproned smith, who has evidently excited them almost to a state of frenzy. They come up to the rest, and Peter mounts a bench. The crowd is still shouting, until he bids the people listen.]

Peter. You may well shout, my friends, though
it's a wonder your bellies have any shout left in

'em. Look down there : you see that city. Well, that's the place your fathers built and worked in, and where you were born and have worked—and that's truth. And I tell you that we've got to settle these cursed rats or they'll munch the very walls before your eyes, and that will be the end of Hamelin—and that's truth. Who's eating your bread ?

Crowd. The rats ! The rats !

Peter. Who's turning your beds into dirty nests ?

Crowd. The rats ! The rats !

Peter. Who's making the day-time into a bad dream and the night into a worse ?

Crowd. The rats ! The rats !

Peter. Ay, the rats, the rats, and that's truth ! But who is to be blamed ? You can blame a rat—and what will a rat care ? I want to know whose business it is to look after our city for us.

Crowd. The mayor's !

Peter. That's truth ! And what does the mayor do year in and year out ? What is there for him to do ? Precious little but to grow fat. But once and again something happens when a mayor's wit can help us, so we keep him and feed him, and call him worshipful, in case one day or another we should want him. And that day has come, and what does his worshipful fatness do—that's

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what I want to know? I'll tell you: he rubs his fat stomach—and I'd like to know, too, how he keeps his stomach fat just now—*(cries of assent from the crowd)* yes, he rubs his fat stomach, and pulls his beard, and he says, "I really must think it over." Yes, we may starve and be made as limp as—as this apron, while the fat worshipful mayor thinks it over.

The Pied
Piper

Crowd. Shame! Make him do something! Shame!

Peter. Ay, shame, shame, shame—and that's truth! Now then, you cry out "Make him do something," and, by my hammer, that's what we've got to do. Go and fetch the fat mayor—and bring the corporation, too.

[Loud cries and cheers, and several of the citizens run back to the city.]

Peter. Now listen, all of you. We will make no more words with this rascally mayor and his fellows. We will give them till to-morrow noon to rid us of this pest. If they fail, they shall be thrown together into the river.

Crowd. Yes, yes! The river—the Weser—the river: throw them in—they deserve it!

Peter. They deserve it—that's truth.

[In the distance is seen the tall figure of the Piper, his pipe to his lips. The people

see him, and watch him while he walks slowly across the green, piping and taking notice of no one. After a moment of curiosity, the people are amused and laugh at him. Unconcerned, he disappears, still piping.

[The attention of the crowd is now turned towards the city gate; the Mayor and Councillors are being brought out, jostled rather roughly. They are brought up to the crowd. Peter makes a mock obeisance, and the people laugh and follow suit, many of them kneeling. The Mayor and Councillors are angry and frightened.]

Peter. You are very welcome, your worship. Your worship has, no doubt, had good time to think it all over. Now your worship will stand there, and I will stand here, and we will discuss all the things that your worship has thought.

[He indicates two benches. The Mayor is put up on to one, the Councillors standing round him. Peter mounts the other, and round him stands the crowd.]

Peter (growing angry as he speaks). Your worship, here are met the good folk of Hamelin city. They are not a rich folk, your worship. Yet they have always worked truly, and had a loaf in the cup-

board. They are not law-breakers, nor a troublesome folk to govern. It is not a heavy burden, your worship, to be master of Hamelin. The mayor of Hamelin has time to grow fat, your worship. But we do not keep a mayor for nothing but rolling to and from the Town Hall day by day and mouthing foolish saws, your worship. We let him do this so that when the city needs wit, other than that of bakers and tanners and smiths, it shall not be wanting. In brief, your worship, we are being eaten up by rats, and we come to you to save us. Day after day you have wagged your head and told us that you were thinking it over. And we are tired of waiting while you think—and that's truth. [*Cries of angry assent from the crowd.*]

Mayor. My good people, I am sure that the rats have given me very great anxiety. (*Derisive laughter.*) Oh, you may laugh, but I tell you it's a very serious thing.

Citizen. We know that. Get on.

Mayor. They have eaten one of my best cheeses.

Another Citizen. They've eaten everything I've got. My children are starving.

A Mother. Yes, our children are starving. Three children I've got. They are all starving.

Mayor. Yes, yes, but you must have patience. I've been thinking this matter over very carefully.

Peter. What have you done ?

Crowd. Ay, what have you done ?

Mayor. Well, as you know, we have tried poison and we have tried traps——

Citizen. What's the good of killing two or three hundred a day when there are thousands of them ?

Mayor. That's just it—you see there are such a lot of them. But what are we to do ?

Peter. That's what we want you to tell us. You keep your larder full, and cry out because you lose a cheese ! Our larders are empty, and we shall die. Do you understand that, fat mayor ? We shall fall down in the streets and die, because we have no food. Look at these people. They look alive enough, you say ! Shall I tell you what is putting spirit into them at this moment ? It's anger, anger with a fat mayor and his owlsh councillors, who don't know their business, and whose heads are full of string instead of brains—and that's truth !

[A burst of shouting from the crowd.]

Mayor (thoroughly frightened). Just a moment, my friends, I will see what can be done.

[He confers with the Councillors, while the people talk angrily together.]

Mayor. My good people, you must understand that I am in a very difficult position. But I have

just spoken to my colleagues, and we have decided to go together to my house and think the matter over very carefully—

The Pied
Piper

[The fury of the crowd breaks out, and the Mayor and Corporation are in danger of being mobbed, but Peter quietens the hubbub.]

Peter. Your worship, you see we are determined to have no more fooling. Now listen. We shall come to you at noon to-morrow. If you have not done something by then that will rid Hamelin of rats, we shall take you and your mock-skull councillors, and pitch you into the Weser.

[The Mayor and Councillors are terrified, while the people shout their approval. Suddenly in the midst of the noise the piping is heard, and the Piper is seen in the distance. He comes down to the crowd. The people jeer and laugh at him, but gradually become quiet as his strange influence is felt among them, until at last there is complete silence save for the piping. Then he stops.]

Piper. Has anyone a sixpence for a piper? Nobody? Well-a-day.

Mayor. Who are you?

Piper. I? Goodman Piper.

Peter. Well, what do you want ?

Piper. Riddles, eh, friend Peter ?

Peter. Peter—how do you know me ?

Piper. I know everyone. I have been everywhere. I can do everything.

[The Mayor hurriedly confers again with the Councillors.]

Peter. A long tongue, Master Piper, but you seem true man. Are you true man ?

Piper. True man to true men, friend Peter.

Mayor. Did we hear you say, fellow, that you could do everything ?

Piper. I said that, your worship.

Mayor. I doubt you are a boasting fellow.

Piper. What should I win by boasting to a fat mayor of Hamelin, your worship ?

[The people laugh.]

Mayor. You are saucy, too.

[The Piper looks at him haughtily, lays his pipe to his lips and begins to move away.]

Mayor. Here, fellow, stay ! You did say, everything ?

Piper. What does your fat worship want ?

Mayor. Hamelin is full of rats.

Piper. I know.

Mayor. How should you know ?

Piper. I know—that is enough.

Mayor (coming down from his bench, speaking in a voice of almost desperate supplication). Could you rid Hamelin of the rats ?

Piper. I could.

[*There is breathless excitement among the crowd as this is said.*]

Mayor. Are you sure ? Yes, yes, I beg your pardon. And—er—what should we have to pay you ? Or perhaps you wouldn't like to be paid anything ?

Piper (first piping a few notes meditatively, then speaking sharply and definitely). A thousand guilders.

Mayor. A thousand guilders !

Peter. Come, come ! What are a thousand guilders to a rich mayor ?

[*Cries of assent from the crowd.*]

A Mother. Don't you see that it is a chance to save us and our children ? You must, you must.

Mayor. Well, perhaps the city treasury can manage it——

Peter. No, your worship. Not the treasury, but your worship's pocket.

[*Cries again.*]

Mayor. But, really——

Peter. Remember—to-morrow at noon.

[*The crowd is becoming angry again.*]

Councillors speak to the Mayor. The Piper waits, quite impassively.

Mayor. Very well, fellow. Rid us of the rats and you shall have your thousand guilders.

Piper. Your worship is wise.

[He begins to pipe again, and walks down to the city and disappears through the gate, the people watching him. The crowd breaks up into groups, eagerly discussing the possibilities of this new hope, the Mayor and Councillors doing likewise. The piping is heard from inside the city. A number of people say nothing, but watch the gate intently. Some of the Councillors get into an altercation with the citizens and in the midst of this the watchers cry out, pointing to the city. In the gateway, his back to the crowd, the Piper is seen standing piping and slowly gesticulating at intervals with one hand, as if charming something towards him. There is not a sound from the crowd, and the Piper mounts the steps on to the wall. He walks along the wall, still turned away from the crowd, piping as it were to something below him in the city. He descends the wall at the far end, and passes down

towards the river. Numbers of the people mount the wall at the back of the scene, watching excitedly. As they realise what is happening they cry out to the people below them—"The river, the river! He's leading them to the river!" Then again—"They are all in, drowning, drowning, all of them," and so on—"Hurrah for the Piper! the Pied Piper!" They come away from the wall, and some are making off to the city, but the Mayor mounts a bench again and speaks.

The Pied
Piper

Mayor. My good people, see what I have done. I think I may say that this has been the most difficult problem that has ever been known in Hamelin. It required the most careful consideration, the clearest head. I may say that had you not had an extremely—er—energetic, I won't say clever, mayor to guide you, you would have been destroyed by the rats, utterly destroyed. You owe a very great deal to your mayor, I can tell you.

Citizen. Hurrah for the Mayor!

[The crowd cheers faintly.]

Peter. Hurrah for the Piper!

[Loud cheers from the crowd.]

Mayor. Never mind the Piper ; a strolling good-for-nothing, I'll be bound.

Councillor. Hear, hear ! Now, my good people, don't be ungrateful. Give three hearty cheers for his worship.

Peter. Come along then.

[And they cheer at his bidding.]

Mayor. That's right. I thank you. Now, go someone and fetch the band, and presently you shall all feast, for the ovens can start again and the butchers get to the pens.

[One runs off to the city for the band, and again the crowd breaks up, some dancing, some playing games, some talking. While they are doing so, the band comes out of the city playing, and all the people sing in chorus, dancing between times, the Mayor and Councillors moving pompously from place to place.]

The plague has gone from Hamelin City—

Ha, ha ! Ha, ha !

The good grey river has no pity

For whiskered rats who thieved our bread

And kept us all from toil and bed ;

The whiskered rats are drowned and dead—

Ha, ha !

No more we'll hear the ghostly patter—

Ha, ha ! Ha, ha !

The Pied
Piper

No more the gibber and squeal and chatter

Of lolloping rats on the winding stair ;

No more they'll clean the cupboards bare,

The Weser has them in its care—

Ha, ha !

[The band plays a moment while they dance.

Then suddenly its music changes to that of the Piper. The Mayor and people are startled, but the dancing continues, and they do not see the Piper, who comes up to them in his black cloak. When he reaches the Mayor he drops the cloak, and holds out his hand, while the music stops and everyone is silent.

Piper. One thousand guilders.

Mayor. A thousand guilders ! Nonsense !

Piper. Your worship has humour.

Mayor. But what do you really want ?

Piper. One thousand guilders.

Mayor. But this is nonsense. I never heard of such a thing. A thousand guilders indeed.

Piper. That is the sum agreed.

Mayor. Agreed ! Where is the agreement ? Show me that.

Piper. Your worship, be careful. I have taken the rats from Hamelin. You promised to pay me a thousand guilders if I did that. It is done, and only I could have done it. You are a fat mayor, a comfortable mayor, and now that the rats are gone you think you are a safe mayor. I warn you, be a careful mayor.

Mayor. Now don't you try to browbeat me, my fellow. I won't have it—you understand—I won't have it. You played a tune for five minutes, and you want a thousand guilders. That is roguery, and I know what to do with rogues. But I don't mind giving you something for your purse, and something handsome, too. I will give you thirty—no, I'll give you fifty guilders for your pains. There.

[He offers him a purse.]

Piper. Your worship—one thousand guilders.

Mayor. Pooh! The fellow's mad. I'll have you locked up, that's what I'll do. I'll have you beaten and——

Piper. Your worship, I have asked twice. It is not my custom to ask more than once for anything. I will be generous and ask a third time.

Peter. You should pay, your worship. You promised.

[The crowd cries—“Yes, pay him, pay him.”]

Mayor. I say it's nonsense. If I made any

such foolish promise, of course I didn't mean it. The Pied
I offer him fifty guilders, and I'll be bound it's Piper
the best day's work he has ever done. Now, fellow,
fifty guilders. What do you say?

Piper (angrily). Fat mayor, be careful. It is the
third time. One thousand guilders.

Mayor. You are an insolent knave, and you
shall be whipped.

[The Piper stares at him for a moment, then lifts his pipe to his lips and begins to pipe, watching the crowd. A child runs up to him, and is joined by others, until all the children are standing before him, laughing and clapping their hands. The rest of the people watch, amazed, scarcely realising what is happening. The Piper moves towards the city, the children following him. At the gate he stands piping, and other children come to him from the city. He turns, and, with the long line of children at his heels, he leads them straight through the people, who are paralysed into half-terrified, half-wondering, inertness. He goes out into the open country, the children behind him still laughing delightedly.]

[The people come to themselves, and some of

the younger and more active men rush off in pursuit. The mothers crowd round the Mayor and storm at him.

A Mother. Our children—you've let him rob us of our children.

Another. I had a little boy and he's gone away. Do you know what that means? He had curls, your worship, the prettiest curls in Hamelin. Thief, thief, thief!

Tanner (his wife in his arms). Three at a blow.

His Wife. Three, your worship. We've worked hard days for them, aye, and gone without often enough ourselves. And what is the end of it all? Shame on you!

Mayor. Now, patience, my good women——

Another Mother. Patience—how should we be patient! What should you know about it to cry patience? If I'd my way I'd teach you patience in a little room behind bolts, that's what I'd do!

[A Mother sings the first two lines of the following lament, three others join her, and then all the mothers together.]

Goodman Piper, pipe them back,
The little laughing folk we lack.

Across the threshold, down the street,
And over the meadows he led their feet.

And they knew us not as they passed us by, The Pied
And our lips were sealed that we might not cry Piper

To hinder them. O, bring them back,
The little laughing folk we lack.

O, long black hair and golden shoon
And yellow pipe with its evil tune :

O thief, tall thief, why came you thus
To steal the little babes of us ?

O, little babes, come back, come back,
Lest we too great a thing should lack.

What of the little pillows white
All waiting in the candle-light ?

What of the wasted lullaby ?
O hear us, hear—we cry, we cry !

They hear us not. Alack, alack !
O Goodman Piper, pipe them back.

*[As they are finishing, the Mayor and Coun-
cillors try to steal away, but are brought
back by Peter and the citizens. Then
two or three of the men who have gone to
seek the children come back.]*

Peter (the mothers all round him, waiting eagerly).
Well, have you seen anything ?

Citizen. We followed down the valley until we came to the hillside. They turned up to the road that leads to the great elms. We ran, quickly, but when we came to the corner they had gone. Not a sign of them, nor a sound, anywhere. Like a wisp of smoke in the wind they had gone, like a shadow of water on a sunny bank.

[The mothers break out into a wail, and Peter goes up to the Mayor furiously.]

Peter. Now, you fat mayor, what are you going to do now ?

Mayor. What can I do ? It wasn't my fault.

Peter. Of course it was your miserable mean fault.

[One of the children, a cripple, who went away with the Piper, returns. He is crying. His mother runs out to him. The people all listen intently.]

Mother. My little lame one ! He has come back—oh, he has come back. (*Comforting him*) There now, there. Where did the tall man take you to ? And where have the others gone ?

Child. Oh, the kind tall man and his music and all my friends—I've lost them all. Why was I lame, mother ?

sold all our children for your dirty guilders. Bind him and his long-shank fellows to the posts. Bind them up.

[They take the Mayor and Councillors and bind them to the posts of the bowling green, everyone helping. When they have finished, Peter addresses them.]

Peter. Now, there you stay, and without a crust, until the children come back. And if they never come, then you shall stay there till you rot. And may the curse of Hamelin be on your heads.

[The crowd joins in the curse and then goes angrily back to the city, the mothers sorrowfully apart.]

Mayor. This is a pretty mess. Why didn't you advise me to pay ?

Councillor. It serves you right. But what have we done ?

Another. Yes, that's what I want to know.

Another. You're a bad scoundrel !

Mayor. How dare you speak so to the mayor ?

Another. So you are. You're worse than the rats.

Another. Big, fat rat—a plague on you !

Mayor. Oh, dear, oh, dear ! What shall I do ?

Another. I don't care what you do, but what are we to do ? If the children don't come back

we shall all starve, and these cords are cutting me. The Pied
Piper

Another. Can't you think of something ?

Another. If I could get away from this post I'd thump your round head. I'd make it flat.

Mayor. I'd give three thousand guilders to get out of this. Yes, I'd give three thousand.

[The piping is heard again in the distance, and the Piper is seen. He comes to them and stands silently laughing before them.]

Piper. Fat mayor, fat mayor—who wouldn't pay the Piper ?

Mayor. Master Piper, Master Piper, bring them back.

Piper. And my wages ?

Mayor. You shall have your thousand guilders.

Piper. A thousand. That's what you promised for the rats ; no more for the children ? Besides, you just said you would give three thousand guilders.

Mayor. How did you hear that ?

Piper. I hear everything.

Mayor. Three thousand guilders is a lot of money.

Piper. I am not here to bargain.

Mayor. Oh, tell me, Master Piper, what am I to do ?

Piper. You are a greedy mayor, a dishonest mayor: and your councillors are fools. I do not want your guilders, but Hamelin must have an honest mayor and councillors. I shall make you honest. The people shall have their children back, and you will come with me instead. You shall stay in the mountain for a month and a week and a day, and I will teach you how to be honest men and true men: and Hamelin will love you better. You shall learn strange things in my mountain. Come along.

[He unties the cord from one Councillor and directs him to free the rest. As this is being done he stands piping. When they are all freed they turn to go back to the city. The Piper cries—"Come," and they are compelled to stop as the piping begins to hold them. Slowly he draws them to him, and then turns back to the mountain, and they follow him, dancing awkwardly, but laughing and more genial than they yet have been.]

[As they disappear a citizen is seen on the wall of the city. He sees that they have gone and cries back into the city—"They have escaped." Again the crowd pours out, and scatter in search. And once

again the piping is heard, and in the distance the Piper is seen bringing back the children. The Mayor and Councillors are laughing with them and dancing. A cry of joy bursts from the crowd, and the children run to the mothers. The Piper calls the children about him and bids them good-bye. Then he begins piping again, and the Mayor and Councillors line up behind him.

Peter. Where are you going, your worship? We are willing to forgive you.

Piper. He is going with me. And his councillors are going too. They will stay with me in the mountain for a month and a week and a day; and they will learn from me how to be better men for Hamelin. Do not speak to them, they will not answer you. You will never see me again, but your children's children may need me, and I shall come. Farewell.

[The people cheer farewell to him, the children in front. He goes, piping, leading the Mayor and Councillors. The people watch them till they have disappeared. Peter again mounts his bench.]

Peter. Citizens of Hamelin, cheer for the Pied Piper.

[The crowd cheers.]

Peter. He has saved us from the rats (*cheers*).
He is making us a better mayor and councillors
(*cheers*): and he gave us back the children when
Hamelin didn't play him fair. (*Cheers.*) A song
for the Piper.

The people sing, as they pass back into the city.

And was the piper man a shade,
Or was he man indeed,
And was the music that he made
Upon his yellow reed
A thing we heard or but a dream
Upon a summer day,
And was he true, or did he seem,
And has he gone away ?

And shall he ever come again,
And does he travel far,
And does he sup with mortal men
Where cakes and flagons are ?
Or does he walk along the skies
And rob the stars of dew
To pour upon our dusty eyes
And make the world anew ?

Good luck, good luck, O piper pied !
We know not whence you came,

Nor to what land nor on what tide
You go in wind or flame,
Yet good you brought to Hamelin
As only good men can,
And may your sorrow not begin,
Good luck, O piper man.

The Pied
Piper

The Only Legend

A Masque of the Scarlet Pierrot

An old Peasant woman comes by, carrying a basket of fruit and flowers ; she is tired, and moves slowly and wearily, she falls to the earth, worn out.

A Pierrot looks through the leaves and sees her. He comes up to her and stands over her un pityingly, taking what he can carry of the fruit and flowers. He moves away carelessly, eating. He does not look back.

Music is heard, and a young Peasant comes down the old woman's path. Under his rough clothes are seen glimpses of scarlet. He tends her, giving her water from his water-bottle, splashing it on her face ; she remains inert, and he is troubled. Rising, he sees the Pierrot in the distance and calls to him—"You, you there." The Pierrot comes back.

The Peasant (handing him the bottle). Fetch me some more water, quickly.

The Pierrot. Why.

The Peasant. This old woman ; don't you see ? She is ill—dying I think.

The Pierrot. Well ?

The Peasant. A little water may save her.

The Pierrot. What have I to do with saving her.

The Peasant. But we can't watch her die.

The Pierrot. Why not ?

The Peasant. It would be cruel.

The Pierrot. It would be less troublesome than fetching water.

The Peasant (astonished). Who are you ?

The Pierrot. I am—why do you ask ?

The Peasant. Have you no pity ?

The Pierrot. Pity—what is that ?

The Peasant. No love ?

The Pierrot. Love! You are a fool. What should a Pierrot do with love ?

[The old woman stirs ; the Peasant kneels beside her again and drains his bottle for its last drop. She comes to, and he raises her until she leans against his knee.]

The Woman. Thank 'ee, thank 'ee.

The Peasant. There, there — that's better. Better ?

The Woman. Thank 'ee. What have you done with my marketings ? I'm going to market : sixpence perhaps I'll get for the basketful. Where are my fruit and my flowers ? There—he's got them. Who's he ?

The Peasant. There now, he shall put them back. The Only Legend
You—put them back in the basket.

The Pierrot. I want them for myself.

The Peasant. You put them back or——

The Pierrot (sullenly). Very well—but it is foolish to waste them on an old woman.

The Peasant. What do you mean ? They are hers.

The Pierrot. What does that matter ? I wanted them—they are pretty.

The Peasant. Have you a heart ?

The Pierrot. No.

The Peasant. You poor Pierrot.

The Pierrot. What do you mean ?

The Peasant. Not to love anybody. Fancy.

The Pierrot. Nobody has loved since the Scarlet Pierrot went away. He loved. That was a thousand years ago—more.

The Peasant. Nobody !—nonsense.

The Pierrot. No Pierrot.

The Peasant. I see. And who was the Scarlet Pierrot ?

The Pierrot. Who— ? Do you come from earth ?

The Peasant. Of course.

The Pierrot. Then you wouldn't know—wait.

[*The Pierrot gives a long shrill whistle, and the cloaked figures rise and drop their*

cloaks. They are Pierrot folk of all ages. Some have flutes, pipes, and so on. They come up to the three and sit in a large semi-circle round them, facing the audience.

The Pierrot. These people are from earth.

[There is a murmur of surprise.

This man wants to know if Pierrot folk love.

[There is laughter from them all.

And he wants to know who was the Scarlet Pierrot.

[All the laughter stops ; they look out in front of them wistfully, and bow their heads sadly.

There—he doesn't know who the Scarlet Pierrot was. Shall we tell him. Shall we ?

[They all whisper together.

All. Yes, yes.

[The musicians play, some dance, then some take up the music, singing.

In Pierrot land a thousand years ago
There lived a proud adventurous Pierrot.

He was as all were, save that he would muse
In lonely ways as listening for strange news.

He said that all the Pierrot folk were lost,
Being as brown leaves broken in the frost.

And that they must as dead folk go their ways The Only
Till some new thing should quicken them to praise. Legend

And he would watch the pear blossom ablow
Wherein the April bees went to and fro,

Or in the clover fields of June would lie
And count the swallows wheeling in the sky,

And ever was the burden of his thought—
“ What is this thing, that lacking, we are nought ? ”

Till once upon his lonely travelling
He found a girl who answered him this thing,

A girl of earth, and though he strove to tell
This wonder to the folk, it was not well.

For none could hear, yet all in envy grew
Of this that he alone among them knew.

He was as none had been, and, being as none,
They hated him for this that he had won.

They cursed his gentleness, and all the mild
Behaviour of his traffic they reviled.

And time was when he led this messenger
To marrying, for his great love of her.

And the folk in the jealous anger on them laid
Met at the marriage hour and slew the maid.

He watched his girl die, and one scarlet stain
Of blood was all the token of her pain,

One scarlet spot upon his linen white
That grew and grew and turned the whole to bright

Fury of scarlet as he knew her dead.
And then they scourged and cast him out and led

Their lives unchanged, and knew not any whit
Of loving more than they had known of it.

They drove him out a thousand years ago
Clad in his scarlet dress, alas, Pierrot.

The Pierrot. There, now you know who he was.

The Peasant. And what happened to him afterwards ?

The Pierrot. Nobody knows. It is said that he never died. It is even said that the girl did not die, but that he went back to earth with her. But nobody knows. They were wrong to send him away. We do not love, but it might have been a good thing to learn. They were wrong.

The Peasant. Yes.

The Pierrot. Nobody knows about him, but we believe many things. The Only
Legend

The Peasant. What.

The Pierrot. You see that tree ?

The Peasant. Yes.

The Pierrot. It is said that once since he was driven out he has returned, many ages afterwards. Nobody knew him till he had gone again, but he planted a seed. It grew into that tree : it has never borne leaf or blossom.

The Peasant. That is strange.

The Pierrot. A little strange, perhaps. We believe that some day the tree will blossom, and that when it does he will come back again.

The Peasant. You really believe that ?

The Pierrot. Well ! we say we do. I think so. Yes, of course we do.

The Peasant. When do you think it will blossom ?

The Pierrot. Oh ! not while we are alive—afterwards.

The Peasant. I see. Would you like it to blossom while you are alive ?

The Pierrot. Yes, certainly. Once a year we meet to ask that it shall blossom soon. That has been a custom since it grew.

The Peasant. But do you really wish it ?

The Pierrot. Yes, I think so. We don't ask

ourselves questions like that. At least, not often. We have no time. (*Impatiently*) Yes, of course we wish it.

The Peasant. Will you let this old woman rest with you a little while? She is tired and hungry.

The Pierrot. Why should we?

All. Why? Why?

The Pierrot. It would do us no good.

All. None. No good.

The Peasant (*lifting the woman up*). You do not want the tree to blossom.

The Pierrot. That is blasphemy against the Scarlet Pierrot.

The Peasant. It is truth.

The Pierrot. You shall be beaten—you are a rogue. [*They beat him.*]

The Peasant. You do not want the tree to blossom. You lie to yourselves. You shall see.

The Pierrot. See what?

[*The Peasant looks at them gravely for a moment but does not speak. Then he turns and slowly walks away with the old Peasant woman, carrying her basket, she leaning on his arm. All watch them go.*]

The Pierrot. What did he mean?

All (to each other). What did he mean ?

The Only
Legend

[They look at each other for a moment, perplexed. Then suddenly they break out into peals of cold, heartless laughter, and some begin a light, cruel music. They dance off, some of them, old and weak, following slowly, uncared for.]

[One Pierrot stays behind on a stone seat, a large square construction within columns, a kind of chair of ceremony. Another Pierrot and a Pierrette are left alone as the others go. He kisses her roughly and leads her towards the seat, she afraid of him. As they come up to the seat they are confronted by the Pierrot who has been hidden from them by a column. He seizes the Pierrette's wrist, drawing her towards him. He kisses her, throws her aside ; she falls on to the seat, and the two Pierrots are face to face. One strikes the other across the mouth ; they seize sticks, fight fiercely. The Pierrot from the seat beats his rival to the ground, leaving him there motionless. He stands laughing over him, and turns back to the Pierrette ; she is dazed and terrified. He lifts her up and carries her a little way]

*in the direction of the crowd's passing.
He lays her at his feet, and cries out—*

I have made her mine by my shoulder's weight,
And there of my might he lies the token,
He coveted her for his wedding mate.
As a twig in the cart-rut he lies broken.

Come out, come out, with book and bell,
And give me the wedding word to say.
He struck ill, and I struck well.
And she is my chosen wage to-day.

*[A Pierrot, as in authority, comes out to him.
They stand with the Pierrette lying
between them.]*

The Master Pierrot. You cry your claim.

The Pierrot. I claim Pierrette.

The Master Pierrot. And in what name ?

The Pierrot. The eyelids set
On him who sought
To master me.

*The Master Pierrot (looking at the prostrate
Pierrot).*

Pierrette is bought,
Your will shall be.

*[He calls back to the people, who come out as
he speaks.]*

Come all with carol and with flute,
With pipe and horn and flageolet,
Let no lip on this day be mute
When Pierrot takes to wife Pierrette.

Sing praise to the prevailing hand
Till time devise its overthrow.
Let song be loud upon the land
To celebrate Pierrot, Pierrot.

Pierrot who struck his brother well,
And sent him to so sound a sleep,
Give him his wedding-word to tell
And make the wage his own to keep.

[The musicians play while others sing.]

To the strong, to the strong
Be the garners that flow
And the wine and the song
And the praise of Pierrot.
Let the hand that can break
Gather all that it may,
And whoso can take
Bear the treasure away.

Crush the fruit if you can
To the core of its juice,

Crush the heart of a man
If his blood be of use,
Tread hard on the road
Spare none as you go—
Upon such is bestowed
The praise of Pierrot.

You have broken him down,
And we pledge you in song.
And we cry your renown.
Come along, come along.
To you was the pride
Of the faring to-day.
To you be the bride
To use as you may.

[As they are singing the Pierrot lifts the Pierrette up; she walks with him, a poor broken prize. The Master Pierrot leads them towards the seat, the others following. As they move up the hurt Pierrot turns, lifting his hands to them for help; they pass him by. The Master Pierrot stands by the seat, with the two in front of him; the others look on in a group on their left. The Pierrot watches the sobbing Pierrette, cruelly, without pity.]

The bare tree on the right of the seat is in full view of all.

The Only
Legend

The Master Pierrot (formally). Is there one among you all who claims this Pierrette ?

The Pierrot. I claim her.

The Master Pierrot. She is claimed. You hear. Does any man among you question his claim ?

The Hurt Pierrot (feebly raising himself) I—I——

The Master Pierrot. A challenge. Dare you make it good with your strength ?

The Hurt Pierrot. I—I——

[He falls back exhausted, derided by the crowd.]

The Master Pierrot. And any other among you ?

The Crowd. No ! No ! His claim is good.

The Master Pierrot (ascending step and turning formally towards them). Then——

[The tree breaks into blossom. Everyone sees it, utterly astonished. Around them the Scarlet Pierrot music is heard, and he is seen in the distance, coming towards them, scarlet from head to foot. He comes silently up to them, and stands beneath the tree. No one moves or speaks. He looks at them steadily ; there is a moment's silence.]

The Scarlet Pierrot. Your tree has blossomed.

Are you glad ? (*A pause.*) You do not answer. I have come. Are you glad ? What, not a word ? (*A pause.*)

The Pierrette (*moves towards him and kneels before him*). Can you help me ?

The Scarlet Pierrot. What is your trouble ?

The Pierrette. I do not know ; I am unhappy.

The Master Pierrot (*coming down to them*). This is nonsense ; she has been won.

The Pierrot. Yes, she belongs to me.

The Scarlet Pierrot. Won ? Belongs to you ? (*As though talking to himself*) Do you want to hear me ? I wonder.

The Master Pierrot. To hear what ?

The Scarlet Pierrot. To be told a simple thing.

The Pierrot. What ?

The Scarlet Pierrot. That love is good.

The Master Pierrot. Love ! That is a legend.

The Scarlet Pierrot. It is the only legend—Love is good.

The Pierrette (*rising*). Love is good—I know now, I know.

The Pierrot. Come. You belong to me.

The Scarlet Pierrot. You are wrong, she belongs to love.

The Pierrot. What are you talking about ? You shall be beaten. [*Moves up to him threateningly.*]

The Scarlet Pierrot. Yes, you have said that before. The Only Legend

The Pierrot. Before ?

The Scarlet Pierrot. To-day.

The Pierrot. To-day ?

The Scarlet Pierrot. And a thousand years ago.

The Master Pierrot. This fellow is mad.

The Pierrot. Come—beat him, break him.

[The crowd make towards him.]

The Pierrette (defending him). You shall not.

The Scarlet Pierrot. Let them, my child.

The Pierrette (pleading, to the Pierrot). Don't you understand ? Can't you feel that there is something to learn ? Love is good.

The Pierrot (puzzled). Love is good.

The Pierrette (eagerly). It is the only legend.

[The Pierrot looks at the hurt Pierrot. As though in spite of himself he goes to him and kneels by him. He calls—bring me some water. It is brought to him. He bathes his face and lifts him to his feet. Still as though not realising what he is doing, he leads him up to the Scarlet Pierrot, and stands staring at him.]

The Pierrot. Love is good—that is strange, strange.

The Master Pierrot (taking him roughly by the

shoulder). Are you mad as well? Would you be beaten for no wits too?

[*The crowd moves angrily.*

The Pierrot. It is the only legend.

The Hurt Pierrot (*feebly but exultingly*). I have it; why has no one told us of this before? (*To his fellow*) You helped me. That is a new, strange thing.

The Scarlet Pierrot (*taking the Pierrette's hand. He leads them to the step, placing her between the Pierrots*). You will teach them all. There are three of you, that is enough. Say it—together.

The Three. Love is good—It is the only legend.

The Scarlet Pierrot. Go, back to your city—tell everybody—three of you—strong, fearless now. You are enough.

[*They go, down towards the city. The Pierrot moves back towards the tree, watching them. The crowd is silent, perplexed.*

The Master Pierrot. That is very clever of you, isn't it? To make three mad people among us.

The Scarlet Pierrot. They will make you all mad, very soon, mad as great kings of love.

The Master Pierrot. I do not understand at all.

The Scarlet Pierrot. It is no matter; you will understand. There are three measures of leaven among you. It is enough; already it is working.

[*The old Peasant woman comes down the path again. She passes in front of them all, and again she falls to the earth, worn out. The Master Pierrot goes to her, not quite sure of himself. He stands over her, looking at her curiously ; then he speaks.*

The Only
Legend

The Master Pierrot. I think that perhaps someone should help her. Some water I think. (*Several of them run for pitchers, which they bring, offering to tend her. He stops them.*) I think perhaps I will see to this. (*He takes a pitcher and gives her water, kneeling. She looks up—he rises, drops the pitcher and speaks.*) It is the only legend.

The Scarlet Pierrot (*not moving from his tree*). Leave her, I will see her on her way.

The Master Pierrot (*turning to the crowd speaking very quietly, wondering at himself*). Love——

All (*slowly*). Love is good—It is the only legend.

[*They all go, the Scarlet Pierrot music with them, their voices measured softly to it. The old woman rises, her back to the audience. The Scarlet Pierrot watches them till they have passed out of sight. He comes to the woman, facing her. She drops her ragged cloak and turns. She is young, beautiful.*

The Scarlet Pierrot. A thousand years, ten thousand, but it comes. [*They move away together.*

[*The Pierrot people pass by again to a light merry music, the older folk behind with others helping them. The Scarlet Pierrot and the girl watch them pass—then they too go.*

Robin Hood and the Pedlar

At the edge of a Wood.

Robin Hood (sings).

Let life go unforbidden,
Straight-limbed among the green,
And laughter be unchidden,
And gravity unseen ;
They're grey men are the town men
With crooked legs to run,
But we're the jolly brown men
Carousing with the sun.

I'm brother to the beech tree,
I'm brother to the oak,
And glad the little beasts be
And glad the feathered folk,
And when the clouds are chiding
I'm happy for the rain,
And when the sun goes riding
I'm happy then again.

[He blows his horn and his men come from the wood. Robin repeats a few lines of the song and all sing together. As they are

finishing, an old pedlar hobbles towards them, as though suffering, and falls wearily. They tend him, and he revives.

Robin. Not much comfort where you've been a guest, eh, father pedlar? Bruises, eh? And whose was the stick?

The Pedlar. Nottingham, master—do you know Nottingham?

Robin. Well, yes—we do call at Nottingham now and again. In the dark mostly, to be sure—but still, a very good place. Why?

The Pedlar. Do you know the Sheriff?

Robin. Oh—the Sheriff. So that's it.

[All his men become mischievously interested.]

The Pedlar. He beat me.

Robin. Yes. It's a way of his. He's been told of it before. Why did he beat you?

The Pedlar. Because I told him the truth.

Robin. That always tickles his temper. What was it?

The Pedlar. You were singing a song just now.

Robin. Well?

The Pedlar. You care for a song?

Robin. A good song is a good heart, father pedlar. But what of that?

The Pedlar. There's a man in Nottingham who makes songs. He's a clean man, and clean ringing

songs he makes. A poor man, but he wants Robin Hood nothing but a sixpence once in a while. I was walking along Trent side, master, when it was Monday evening, and I heard a song across the water, as clear and sweet as a cornflower in a maid's white dress. I know a good song—and this was clear and sweet, and rich like harvest elms. And Tuesday I heard it again, in Nottingham streets, and it was a tall fellow singing, lean, with a friendly face. I spoke with him. He'd come into the town he said to sing for sixpence, and would be back again to the fields beyond Trent. And then a Sheriff's man took him, and they used him—I wouldn't use a bad dog so, master. And I followed, and I slipped into the hall. And I told the Sheriff there that this was an ill thing and a dirty thing. And he had me beaten and thrown out. I waited a little, and I heard angry talk. How it was prison for the tall fellow, and how because he sang ballads in their streets he was judged a vagabond and a pest and was to smart for it. And I came away.

[He has blazed with excitement, and now falls back exhausted.]

[Robin and his men hear his tale with growing indignation, until at the close there is a bowl of anger.]

Robin. Master Sheriff shall learn this time.
We'll tease him this time, eh ?

[There is a loud assent from all.]

Robin. Come, the fashion of it ?

[They form into a semi-circle, as in council.]

Robin, Friar Tuck, Little John, and three or four others in the centre. The Pedlar is given food and drink. Each decision of the council is greeted with cheers.

Robin. This singing fellow must be freed.

Little John. And offered a green suit.

Robin. Aye, he shall come to us if he will.

Friar Tuck. And our friend the Sheriff shall pay.

Another. Let him answer for it here in the greenwood.

Another. Aye, bring him here.

Little John. And who's to fetch him ? Shall I ?
[He makes to go.]

Robin. Slowly, John, slowly. To free the ballad man and to fetch the Sheriff. Who is willing ?

[There is a general eagerness for the errands.]

Robin. Then it must be by lot. A line.

[Robin and all his men form into a straight line, Friar Tuck somewhere about the seventh place.]

Robin. Two numbers, father pedlar.

The Pedlar. Numbers ? Three ; eleven.

Robin. Three for the Singer, eleven for the Robin Hood Sheriff.

[Friar Tuck, unseen by Robin, rapidly moves up behind the others to the third place. The man whose place he takes is about to protest, but Friar Tuck grips his arm and puts his hand over his mouth, humorously threatening him.]

Robin. Now.

[They number down, Friar Tuck steps out on number three, and Robin himself on eleven.]

Robin. Good enough numbers.

[Little John, who is far down the line, comes up and looks at the two with disfavour.]

Little John. And I saw two magpies twice this morning, the lying little chickens.

[All laugh and the line breaks up.]

Robin (to Friar Tuck). Choose your men. I go alone.

[Friar Tuck picks three men, including the one he has displaced. A voice is heard in the distance crying a proclamation, and three of the Sheriff's men are seen approaching.]

Robin. Quick—the trees. Come, all of you ; quietly ; when I say “Lawk-a-mussy-be.” (To

Friar Tuck) Off to your ballad man. Round there —they can't see you so.

[The men go into the wood, Friar Tuck and his company off on their journey, skirting round trees to miss the Sheriff's men. Robin untying a ragged cloak and hood that are over his shoulder and putting them on, conceals himself behind a tree.]

[The Sheriff's men come in, and one cries from a paper.]

Whereas the notorious outlaw, Robin Hood, has on divers occasions crossed the authority of His Majesty's Officer, the most honourable Sheriff of His Majesty's loyal city of Nottingham, and whereas the said Robin Hood is unconformable to the law of this land, now be it known that the most honourable Sheriff of His Majesty's loyal city of Nottingham will pay the sum of forty pounds for the person of the said Robin Hood, or for his dead body the sum of twenty pounds. Long live the King.

[Another pins up a copy of the proclamation on the tree behind which Robin is hiding. Robin appears, feigning a yokel simplicity.]

Robin. Eh, forty pound. That's a main big lot of money. But I say, Master Officer.

Sheriff's Man. Well, dirt ?

Robin Hood

Robin. Dirt—that's as mebbe. But I say, Master Officer, what's the use of calling all that out when there's nobody listening ?

Sheriff's Man. What do you know about the law's ways, pigskin ? You come with us. The honourable Sheriff wants a few more lads in the stables and such.

Robin. Does he, now ? Now do you know, I be main frightened of horses, that I be. I can't abide 'em. But why don't you wait till folk be about before you call out all that talk ? Now I just happened to hear, and mebbe I could help.

Sheriff's Man. Twice in every mile for ten miles round Nottingham that's to be cried. And you're a likely ragamuffin to help. Come and serve the Sheriff. There's other jobs besides horses.

Robin. Well, do you know, Master Officer, I can't abide the Sheriff no more than I can abide horse's.

Sheriff's Man. Careful, pumpkin, or you'll learn more about the honourable Sheriff than you want.

Robin. I think that Sheriff of yours, Master Officer, is a dirty, black, snivelling, rascally toad ; of course, no offence, Master Officer.

Sheriff's Man. Seize him, the scurrilous clod.

[*The men go to take Robin, but hesitate before*

a sharp rap on the tender part of their arms.

Robin. Now don't be angry, Master Officer, I can tell you about Robin Hood.

Sheriff's Man. Nonsense. What ?

Robin. Lawk-a-mussy-be !

[He looks straight away from the greenwood at the back, as though staring at something. The Sheriff's Officers follow his look, whilst Robin's men come quietly from the trees and form up a ring behind them.]

Robin. Now just look at that, Master Officer.

Sheriff's Man. What, crazy-brain ?

Robin. No, not there, Master Officer—the other way, there.

[As he speaks he removes his cloak and the Sheriff's men turn round. They are too dumbfounded to move, and fall on their knees in terror.]

[They are seized.]

Robin. That fellow's robe, his hat and chain and belt.

[They take these from the first officer and give them to Robin, who puts them on.]

Robin. Now that is mighty fortunate. You stay here, Master Officer, and I will go and see "the

honourable Sheriff of His Majesty's loyal city of Robin Hood Nottingham." I want to tell him all about "the notorious outlaw, Robin Hood."

[There is a burst of laughter as he mimics the officers. Then cheering as he goes off towards Nottingham. The Sheriff's men are bound, not roughly.]

[There is an interlude to mark the passing of a night. First the outlaws gather round their fires and eat their evening meal. Then they sing.]

The Outlaw's Song.

Joe the Miller he grinds the corn
And gives it us free of a Monday morn,
And we've bread as sweet as blossom of thorn.

Chorus.

Blossom of thorn, blossom of thorn,
~ As sweet as blossom of thorn.

We are Hobman's friends, and to Kate says he,
Let the latch of the dairy door be free,
And Kate's as right as a girl can be.

Chorus.

As a girl can be, as a girl can be,
As right as a girl can be.

Where mine is yours and short is tall
The arrow of one is the arrow of all,
And there's supper for any who care to call.

Chorus.

Who care to call, care to call,
For any who care to call.

Little John. Now, Pedlar, a tale for your supper.

The Pedlar. I've a great stock of tales. Of battle they are, and of cities in far pagan lands, and of love, and of kings and king's men false and loyal. Shall it be a story of a king ?

[The crowd listens to the Pedlar tolerantly.]

Little John. Now I shouldn't wonder, Pedlar, if you know a mighty deal about the likes of kings. (*His fellows laugh.*) Have you ever been to Court, Pedlar ? (*And again.*)

The Pedlar. Yes.

Little John. And seen the King—seen Richard the Lion Heart ?

The Pedlar. Yes.

Little John. And eaten at his table, I shouldn't wonder, eh, Pedlar ?

The Pedlar. Well, I wouldn't boast——

Little John. That's right, Pedlar—don't boast—it's a bad habit and has no friends hereabouts.

The Pedlar. But I have eaten at Lion Heart's Robin Hood table.

Little John. And checked his hasty tongue, perhaps? They say there are times it goes a little wildly.

The Pedlar. Yes, I've scolded the King many's the time.

Little John. Well now, if I'm to listen to a lie, let it be a good full-chested one, that there's no mistaking, say I. You've old bones and old brains, Pedlar, or some of them would fare ill for this. But go on. Spin away. What's this tale of the King?

The Pedlar.

There was a King and his name was—well
He went with a great sword in his hand
And travelled away to the Holy Land,
And many and many a stout wall fell
And many and many a pagan band.

He set his storied crown aside,
He left the royal ease of his throne
And the mellow shires which were his own
To be where the banners of war blew wide
In the land of the sepulchre hewn in stone.

And men he left from Devon to Tweed
Should honour his name in kingly rule,

And some of 'em snugly said—"This fool
Leaves us the corn and goes threshing the weed,
And now is the time for treasure to breed."

But a beggar man came to the English gate,
And day by day he travelled alone
Where ruffling jacks made mock of a throne—
And a reckoning soon or a reckoning late
Is a reckoning still and a reckoning straight.

Little John. Well told, well told. But Richard
is not in England yet.

The Pedlar. Richard? Who said I spoke of
Richard? I said but a king—any king—any king,
Master John.

*[The outlaws fall asleep one by one; a guard
paces round the camp. The Pedlar sleeps
too. A troop of elves and fairies come
out of the wood, dancing, unseen by the
guard. They dance, first apart from the
sleeping forms of the outlaws, then among
them, and then they sing.]*

Grudge nothing to Robin, O valley and wood,
For Robin is honest is Robin Hood.

And may the lantern of Little John
Be bright as ever a lantern shone.

And may the platter of Father Tuck
Bear never a loaf but the loaves of luck.

Robin Hood

Let kindness fall to the men who are kind,
And their fare be sweet from core to rind.

The profit o' days shall never be lean
For the merry men all of the Lincoln Green.

For an easy heart is a properer thing
Than all the treasure-chests of a king.

He has little to lose who has little to keep,
And enough for the day brings bounty of sleep.

[One places a narrow crown of gold on the head of the sleeping Pedlar. A cock crows and they hurry away. For a moment there is silence and no movement but the pacing of the guard. Then Robin's horn is heard in the distance. The guard wakes all, as Robin comes running in. They crowd round him.]

Robin. Not a doubt came against me. His honour wise-pate swallowed me as eagerly as a jack takes a gudgeon. News, your honour, great news, I cried. That plague Robin Hood, your

honour, will be at such a place betimes in the morning to meet one they call Maid Marian. He will be alone, your honour, and may be taken as readily as a gravelled swift. I can lead any you will to the place, your honour. Good, cries the Sheriff, I'll be in this hunting myself. Then it's sure luck to that hunting, your honour, says I. And he bids two of his bowmen be ready. When shall we start? In an hour, says I, but let there be more than two with us, your honour; this Robin is cunning quarry. Well thought, says he, and calls out some four or five more. Just like that he dropped into my hand, as easily as a ripe filbert from its hood. We walked through the night—over some queer land too I brought them—it was a pretty Sheriff up to his waist in muddy water. I left them an arrow's flight back there to breathe, while I went forward to see we were not astray. I feared we might be out of the path, not knowing much of the land hereabouts (*laughing*). Listen. (*To one of his men*) Go you to Marian, and bid her come at once and wait. (*To another*) When I say "Robin Hood is here now" drive an arrow into the ground by me. And the word for all is, "Lawk-a-mussy-be." Again and quietly. In, quickly.

[*He goes off to the Sheriff, the messenger goes to Marian, and the rest make ready to*

hide themselves. They notice the sleeping Robin Hood Pedlar for the first time, the crown still on his head. They wake him.

Little John. What's this ?

The Pedlar. Well now, it looks like a crown.

Little John. And how do pedlars come by crowns ?

The Pedlar. It's odd, isn't it ?

Little John. Odd thieving, eh, Pedlar ?

The Pedlar. No. Not stolen. It's odd. But I'll wear it and thank the giver.

[He puts it on, and all go into the wood. Robin comes in still disguised and with him the Sheriff and six soldiers, very muddy and footweary.]

Robin. This is the place, your honour.

The Sheriff. And a plaguey long way and a plaguey rough way from Nottingham too.

Robin. But Robin Hood to carry back with, your honour—that's a thought makes easy travelling, eh ?

The Sheriff. I'll twist him and fray his green coat.

Robin. To be sure, your honour. Now here's a place for hiding, your honour.

[They hide behind some trees, where they can be seen by the audience.]

[Marian comes in, looking enquiringly about her.]

Robin. That's the wench. Robin Hood is not a mile away now, your honour may be sure.

[Marian walks up and down expectantly.

The Sheriff becomes impatient, looking this way and that.

The Sheriff. Where is he? Why doesn't he come? If you've muddled this, my man, there's payment in Nottingham for fools.

Robin. Be easy, your honour. I've not muddled it, your honour. Robin Hood is here, now.

The Sheriff. Where? What do you mean?

[An arrow quivers in the ground a few paces from them.

The Sheriff (startled). What's that? Is that from Robin Hood?

Robin. No—it's from one of his friends. Robin Hood is near to you, Master Sheriff—be careful.

The Sheriff. Where—where?

Robin (throwing off his disguise). As I promised, Master Sheriff.

The Sheriff (after a moment's alarm). Take him, and the woman too.

[Two men seize Robin and another takes Marian roughly, not without getting his ears clapped.

The Sheriff. Very sly, friend Robin, very sly, aren't you? Bring him, quickly.

Robin. But you wouldn't take me back to Robin Hood Nottingham ?

The Sheriff. Yes, rascal, to Nottingham, and to something worse than a beating.

Robin. You don't say so—now lawk-a-mussy-be !

[*The men come from the wood, as before.*

Little John is behind a tree near to the soldier who holds Marian. He steps out and takes the soldier by the ear ; the Sheriff turns at the man's cry and sees that they are trapped. For a moment he and his men are dazed ; then they take to their heels, running in different directions. Little John keeps his man while the others are pursued, caught, and brought back terrified.

Robin. Good. Very well contrived, eh, Master Sheriff ? Ah—and here's more luck travelling this way——

• [*Friar Tuck and his men are seen approaching, the Ballad Singer with them. Loud cheering greets them.*

Friar Tuck. Good, Robin boy, you've done well and we've done no worse. Hey lads, as bonny a ten minutes as ever a dial marked. Up I go to the gaol-gate in the dark and spoke through to the keeper, a stout fellow, well-shouldered like myself.

That's the fashion of it think I—Tuck shall keep that gate. Evening, porter, peace be on you. Evening, he answers, surly enough. I've a message, say I. What is it? I'm deaf, say I, and he opens the gate. How far is it to Zouch? That's as may be—surly again. You've a rough tongue, porter. What's that to you?—and he turns away. Whizz—my stick on the side of his crown (*during his narrative he feints at the Sheriff's men to illustrate his meaning*) and he was good to say nothing for an hour to come. Then I slipped on his coat and his girdle of keys. In go my three lads in a twinkling and keep in a shadow. I spy a sour fellow on guard. Fetch me the ballad-singing rascal, say I, and give him the keys, and luck was with me for he knew where to pick. Back he comes with our good man there right enough. Whizz—and down goes his sourness with a growl. Out come six or seven others, not quite quick in their senses. Now then, I cry, and my lads and I are about them, and master ballad-singer lends a hand too. Whizz—whizz—whizz—and in the turning of a plough team we're out into the night and clear of Nottingham streets. In five minutes we saw their torches flaming, but east way or west way they didn't come our way.

[He finishes to delighted cries from the crowd.]

Robin. And now, Master Sheriff, for our reckoning. You shall have fair trial, Master Sheriff. Robin Hood

[The outlaws sit round in a circle again.

Robin, Friar Tuck, and Little John in the centre. The Sheriff and his men, including those who were first captured, are placed as for trial, guarded.

Robin. It is said that you are cruel, abusing the power that the King gives you. What do you say ?

The Sheriff. That you are an insolent pack of knaves.

Robin. Hoity-toity. You, ballad man — what have you to say ?

The Ballad Singer. I sang in the street, good songs, and I harmed nobody. And the folk liked my songs and were friendly. And he, for some black spite in him that rails against a good song, had me beaten and thrown like dirt into a mouldy cell. And a man who hates a good song is no fit man to hold a King's power.

[There are cries of assent.

Robin. And you, father pedlar ?

The Pedlar. A good song is a sweet thing and I love it and love all makers of good songs. And when I saw this fellow taken like a felon for the song on his lips, I spoke my mind. And this Sheriff

had me beaten and thrown out. And the King who gave this Sheriff his shift of authority would do well by any man who made good songs and by any who spoke for just dealing. And the King's power has been abused by this musty-veined jack-in-office, and I say it.

[*Cries of assent again.*]

The Sheriff. So a scurvy beggar and tatter-wits is to put the King's Sheriff to rights! And what's that he's got on his head?

Little John. A plaything that he found, Master Sheriff.

The Sheriff. Stole.

Robin. May-be—never mind that. This man is accused of cruelty and abuse of his office. Is he found guilty?

[*Cries of "Yes, guilty," from the outlaws.*]

Robin. There are many old scores, Master Sheriff, and this shall pay for all. What is the penalty?

The Pedlar. May that be mine to say?

Robin. Yours?

The Pedlar. For a whim. I can devise well in this.

Robin. What do you say? Shall we humour him?

All. Yes, let the Pedlar say.

The Sheriff. There shall be a blight on you all

for this. You set a beggar to pronounce on the Robin Hood King's Sheriff! The King's swords shall sweep you out of the land for this—setting a low thieving beggar to brag it over the honourable Sheriff of a loyal city of the King. There shall be whips and halters, I promise you.

The Pedlar. Easily, Master Sheriff, easily. This were a good time to give a civil gate to your words.

The Sheriff. What, brazen-face—you to dare to speak so to the King's Sheriff.

The Pedlar. The King's Sheriff? No, surely. The King would keep no Sheriff to beat good honest folk and whip a man for singing.

The Sheriff. Here's fine talk for a beggar—the King would this and the King would that indeed! But the King's justice shall teach him.

The Pedlar. The King shall be his own justice.

[He throws his pedlar's cloak off, and Richard Cœur de Lion stands before them. All kneel and cheer.]

The Sheriff (prostrating himself). Your majesty—your majesty—— (*his terror will allow him to get no further*).

Richard. Get up, man. You're a knave, but crawling won't mend it.

The Sheriff (getting up, shaking). Does any one know of your majesty's return?

Richard. I had a humour to come unknown and to watch my people, common folk and my deputies and outlawed men alike, quietly, over their shoulders. Good amusement. Profitable too—full of strange instruction. And a beating thrown in. (*The Sheriff sinks at the King's feet again.*) There, man, get up I tell you. That shall not count in the reckoning—I've limbs can take more than your fellows gave—it's well for them I remembered my part or there would have been broken heads among them.

The Sheriff. Mercy, mercy, mercy——

Richard. You shall make sport for us. You have betrayed a great trust ; you have misused a friendly decent fellow ; you have taught your underlings your own nasty manners ; you have put dishonour on a good song. Very well. Robin Hood—Friar Tuck—Little John, come here. There are nine men. Can you settle with three apiece ?

Little John. I'll settle with the whole fry of them myself, your majesty, if you'll give me leave.

Richard. No, three apiece. And for you, Sir Sheriff, you're a coward. None of these fellows can be asked to fight a coward. Marian girl, can you hold a staff ?

Robin. That she can, your majesty.

Richard. Would you beat a knave, girl ?

Marian. Readily, your majesty.

Robin Hood

Richard. Then beat that one.

[Quarter staves are brought and a great ring is formed. Robin, Friar Tuck, and Little John engage three men apiece and Marian the Sheriff. There is wild cheering and excitement, as one by one the Sheriff's men fall bruised and exhausted. The Sheriff and Marian are left, and all attention goes to them until at last Marian beats him to the ground amid roars of delight.]

[As the Sheriff and his men gather themselves up painfully.]

Richard. You have paid, and you are pardoned. I charge all to say nothing of this morning's work. If any tale of misdeeds reaches me again, Master, Nottingham shall hear of Maid Marian.

The Sheriff. No, not that——

Richard. Then look to your behaviour, Master Sheriff. Robin—you and your men henceforth are free men to do as you will.

Robin. Sir, we would change our life for no man's. Let us be your majesty's loyal subjects here in the open world that we love.

Richard. As you will. (*The men kneel in allegiance.*) I go now to London. Will you see me on my way?

Robin. As far as your majesty consents.

[He calls out a dozen of his men and they form a bodyguard.]

Richard. You (*giving the ballad singer a ring*), singer, wear this from Richard in token of his will that you come and go to your own moods. And the King will make you a good audience when the road brings you to London.

The Ballad Singer. Sire, I will make you a song for this, as proud a song as a good King should have.

Richard. And a song before I go. I'll have the one I heard by Trent side.

[The Ballad Singer sings, all repeating verses after him.]

I ask no store of common gear
Who never unrewarded went
Along the twilit fields to hear
The thrushes calling over Trent,
Who carry in my pocket still
A penny piece for courtesy,
If any man would stay to fill
A comfortable cup with me.

I have no falcon on my wrist
Nor any beakers made of gold,
But lips as kind as any kissed
Are mine to kiss, and mine to mould

In shapes imperishably fair

Robin Hood

The brain's tumultuous beating throng,
The wonder of the world I snare
In shining nets of love and song.

[During the song a number of country girls come on, dancing among the singers who are seated, and joining in the song. The song ends.]

Richard. Well sung, and merry days to you all.

[The Sheriff and his men go back towards Nottingham, and the King sets out with his bodyguard to a great shouting from all. The men and girls sing through the chorus of the song as they go back to the greenwood.]